THE FAITHFUL

MASEFIELD

THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

GIFT OF

Kenneth Macgowan

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/thefaithfultrage00maseiala

THE FAITHFUL

By the Same Author

THE DAFFODIL FIELDS

PHILIP THE KING, and other Poems

THE EVERLASTING MERCY and THE WIDOW IN THE BYE STREET (1 volume)

THE STORY OF A ROUND-HOUSE, and other Poems

SALT WATER BALLADS

A MAINSAIL HAUL

THE TRAGEDY OF POMPEY THE GREAT

THE FAITHFUL

A TRAGEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

AUTHOR OF "THE TRAGEDY OF POMPEY THE GREAT," "THE EVERLASTING MERCY," ETC.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1915

All rights reserved

Copyright, 1915
By JOHN MASEFIELD

Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1915.

PR
6025
M37f
1915

To

MY WIFE

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

NOTE

This play is written to be played uninterruptedly, without more break in the action than is necessary to get the actors off the stage and to raise the screen or curtain dividing the scenes.

There are only two scenes: one the front part of the stage, left quite bare, without decoration, but with a screen, set, or backcloth at the back, representing a Japanese landscape, with hills and water, all wintry and severe; the other, the back of the stage, visible when this screen is lifted, a room in a Japanese palace, very beautiful, but bare, save for a few flowers and a picture or two.

A few minutes may elapse between Acts I and II, and a slightly longer wait between Acts II and III.

PERSONS

Asano, A Daimyo.
Kurano, his Counsellor.
Hazama.
Shoda.
Kira, A Daimyo.
Sagisaka, his Counsellor.
Kamei, A Daimyo.
Honzo, his Counsellor.
A Youth of Kira's palace.
A Woman of Kira's palace.
The Envoy.
A Poor Girl.
Lady Kurano.
A Captain of Kira's guards.
Chikara, Kurano's son.
First Ronin.
Second do.
Third do.
Fourth do.
Fifth do.
A Herald.
Guards, Nobles, Attendants, Ronin.

In Act I, Scene I, throughout Act II, and in Scenes I, II, and IV of Act III, the scene is: An open space near Asano's palace.

In Act I, Scene II and in Act III, Scene III, the scene is: A room in Kira's palace.

TIME

Acts I and II, 10th March, 1701.
Act III, 10th March, 1702.

ACT I

THE FAITHFUL

SCENE I—*The outer scene.* ASANO *alone, dawn. A shaft of light strikes colour.*

ASANO [*kneeling*]. Light that my soul has followed, bless this beloved land, where I work with my men to make life nobler. For now my work here is threatened by an evil man, who draws nearer daily, violating Right and Law. [*He rises and stands listening.*] Kurano.

KURANO [*off*]. Is that you, Asano?

KURANO *enters.*

ASANO. Yes, my dear friend, I have waited for you; I need not ask your news, you bring no good news; I see that in your face.

KURANO. No; no good news. The Judges decided against us.

ASANO. You bring yourself at least. Does your wife know?

KURANO. Yes. I have sent to tell her. The men are here, if you will speak with them; they all look to you to save them.

ASANO. Let them come in. Do they guess that we have lost?

[KURANO *lifts a hand to the men.*

KURANO. Yes. They are all afraid of Kira. Come in, there.

[*The men come in and crowd about the lower steps.*

VOICES. Asano! Master Asano! Save us and defend us, beloved master. Lord Kurano, beseech our master to help us!

KURANO. Still! Let the head man come forward. Stand there, Hazama. Our master will speak to you.

[ASANO *comes forward.*

VOICES. Master Asano! Master Asano! Defend us, master!

ASANO. Friends and fellow-workers, it is now twenty years since I came among you on

the death of my father. You know how, in that time, we have worked together, making this province one of the most fruitful, and quite the happiest, in the Empire. If I have failed in this or that, I know that I have won your friendship, and that you have been happy under me. Latterly, as you know, our happiness has been marred by the actions of an ambitious man, whom we now know as Lord Kira. Some of you can remember when that lord was a little boy, the son of a steward, in the house of old Lord Ashiza, who petted him for his cleverness. As you know, presently, when he grew up, he ousted the old lord and took his province. Since then, all of you have seen his treacheries bringing him nearer to this valley of ours, till at last nothing but the hills kept him from us. Last week Lord Kira claimed the hills and occupied them with hired troops, so that we could no longer pasture there. I made my

protest against the seizure. Lord Kurano here has just returned from the Courts where the protest has been heard. He will read the Judges' finding.

VOICES. Ah, our master has saved us!

HAZAMA. Silence, silence!

KURANO. The Judges have decided that the protest lodged by Lord Asano cannot stand, and that the head of the valley claimed by Lord Kira is, truly, Lord Kira's property, together with its inhabitants and their possessions. And to this they set their seals.

[*A moan passes over the crowd.*

HAZAMA. But the head of the valley is free land, between two lordships. It has been free for centuries. It cannot be Lord Kira's.

KURANO. The Judges have decided that it is.

FIRST RONIN. And all that mountain pasture, and the glen where our river rises, is to be his?

KURANO. Yes.

HAZAMA. So. Now he is at our throats.

ASANO. It is bad news; but not hopeless. We have failed in these Courts; but Lord Kira is not here yet. We may still stop him. We must turn, now, to our work. Meanwhile do not quarrel with Kira's men, whatever the provocation, and above all trust me, and be of good hope. After all, a way may be found. Dismiss, and to work, Hazama.

HAZAMA. We thank you, master Asano. God knows we trust you.

VOICES. Thank you, master.

HAZAMA. Dismiss now to work, as the master bids.

[*They go out.*

KURANO. What hope have you, then?

ASANO. None.

KURANO. None?

ASANO. Only a faith, and that is shaken, that the triumph of the wicked is a short one.

KURANO. It was a wicked judgment; the Judges were bribed.

ASANO. It seems that Kira is to have this province. We shall be his next prey. And I have been thinking through the night how much this place means to me. I see that all this will have to end. Our life here and all that we have tried to do is at Kira's mercy. We muster some seventy men and boys; Kira since his marriage has a thousand. What can we do?

KURANO. Rebel and die.

ASANO. Yes, we could do that. But I want what we have sown to live. You know how my ancestors first came here. They were driven from home and roved till they reached this glen, where they could live at peace. I shall do that, Kurano. I shall give up and go, with all my people.

KURANO. Where to?

ASANO. To the outer islands.

KURANO. And leave this a prey to Kira?

ASANO. It is that already.

KURANO. Without a protest?

ASANO. What other protest can I make? My men are like my sons, they shall not be trampled out by Kira. I will carry them out of his reach.

KURANO. And when would you go?

ASANO. Soon.

KURANO. It will break your heart to leave this.

ASANO. Never mind, if I save my men from Kira. I only hesitate for your sake, for you have a wife and son, with a right to something better than exile.

KURANO. There is a kind of exile which is a grand career for any wife or son. . . . But, Asano, I say that you must not abandon this place, but meet Kira with arms, and bring it to civil war here. No one has dared that yet, so Kira has prospered. He is not a robber; he is nothing so noble; he is a knave.

If you fight him he will draw back and it will come to the Commander's ears, and justice will be done.

ASANO. What justice, Kurano? What justice should I get in any Court in this land?

KURANO. The justice that every man like myself does you with his whole heart.

ASANO. My dear Kurano, what Court in the land would not decide for Kira, the ready and the lucky, rather than for me, the friend of man? Kira would ask nothing better than for me to attack him. I am suspect, an innovator, an unorthodox. Every knight in the land would be glad to see me ruined. Besides . . . the worth of the law has been proved already in yesterday's case. My instinct tells me to withdraw, with all who stand by me.

KURANO. My instinct tells you to stand firm.

ASANO. That course needs your power, which I have not got.

KURANO. Here it is, by you.

ASANO. We must live by our own laws, Kurano. No angel is given two messages. I shall warn my people to-night that we shall abandon these old homes of ours. Leave word with Hazama that they muster.

KURANO. It will be a terrible night to your friends.

ASANO. I expect the parting to have every circumstance of pain.

KURANO. You spoke a moment ago as though you were hated and Kira loved. Surely you must know that Kira has made enemies wherever he has gone.

ASANO. He has made slaves, Kurano. His enemies are dead or beggared.

KURANO. He is feared, then. All who fear him would rally to the first man to stand against him.

ASANO. Some things are given to me, Kurano, to know burningly. I know that

Kira has a conquering star, and none can stand against him yet. His cup is not full. We will go into the wilderness with what we believe.

KURANO. You are making a mistake, Asano.

ASANO. I see this too clearly for that.

KURANO. You are despairing.

ASANO. I neither despair nor fear: I see.

KURANO. You take the men's view. They think that Kira is a power. They will find out their mistake too late.

ASANO. They will have their freedom at least.

KURANO. Perhaps. I will tell Hazama to muster them after work to-night. They seem merry yonder. Listen! there! There again.

[*A sound of clapping and cheering draws slowly nearer.*

ASANO. There is little cause for rejoicing in this place.

KURANO. What can they be cheering for?

VOICES. Victory. Asano. Victory. Saved. Victory.

ASANO. Can they have been fighting Kira's men?

KURANO. I hope so. Hark!

The Men *appear.*

VOICES. Victory. Master Asano, they are ruined. Kira is ruined. [*The* Men *crowd up.*

ASANO. How is Kira ruined?

KURANO. Keep back. Keep back. Let Hazama come forward. Let the head man speak; silence, the others.

ASANO. What news have you, Hazama?

HAZAMA. Master Asano, we left you, even now, feeling that Lord Kira was at our throats; we had little hope but to be slaves, and worse than that for some of us. We went away in despair, Master Asano, and now a blessing has come upon us.

ASANO. Can the decree be annulled, Kurano?

KURANO. No. What blessing, Hazama? How has a blessing come?

HAZAMA. We had gone but a little way, to the cross-roads by the bridge, when there came the noise of a horse and a man galloped up, a tall man, in a broidered cloak, riding a stallion which was all great flecks of foam. And when he pulled up, the wind blew the cloak back and we saw all gold, and never once for thirty years has the like been seen here. He was a trumpeter.

KURANO. Is this one of their visions?

ASANO. I do not understand. What trumpeter?

HAZAMA. A trumpeter from the Presence. He blew a great blast on a trumpet, and cried out that we were to prepare.

Then he said if any of us had a complaint to make, or a petition to give, or suffered from any wrong, or were in fear or misery, we were to take heart.

KURANO. Yes?

HAZAMA. Because the very Presence has sent an Envoy here to right all troubles, master, and now Lord Kira will be driven back and we be at peace again.

VOICES. It is blessed news, master.

ASANO. Thank you, Hazama. Since the Envoy has come from the Presence, a thing unknown in our time, we may be sure that injustice will be redressed. Where is the Envoy?

HAZAMA. He is in the province already, master, and his Court is to be held to-day.

ASANO. Thank you. Let this news reassure you. Return now to your work, and be thankful to that August One who watches even over us, in this far corner.

HAZAMA. We are very mindful of Him, Master Asano.

VOICES. We give thanks to Him for this doing of justice.

[*They go out.*

ASANO. This alters everything. I shall go

at once to the Envoy's Court and appeal against Kira.

KURANO. I will come with you. Perhaps the Court has heard of Kira and decided to check him.

ASANO. You are too hopeful, Kurano. I only hope for a little crumb of justice in this question of the hills.

KURANO. Will you speak to the men to-night, notwithstanding?

ASANO. I will wait till I know what the day brings forth.

Enter SHODA

SHODA. Have I the honour of speaking to Lord Asano?

ASANO. I am Asano.

SHODA. I come from the Envoy now visiting this province to tell you that you are to be specially honoured by him.

ASANO. The Envoy's wishes are a law to me, and his honour more than I deserve.

SHODA. You have been appointed to be the Envoy's host when he holds his Court to-day.

ASANO. That is an honour indeed, and a very grateful pleasure.

SHODA. I am happy that my message pleases you. The Lord Kamei who is, I believe, your friend, will act with you and share your task.

ASANO. That will add to my pleasure. I have long known Kamei.

SHODA. The Envoy wishes me to say that he looks forward with much happiness to so pleasant a means of meeting you, of whom he has so often heard praise.

ASANO. I hope that my welcome will not be unworthy of so generous a lord. Before you go, will you not rest in my house a little?

SHODA. I cannot, thank you. The ceremony will begin so soon. I must return.

KURANO. Is not the ritual of receiving the Envoy a difficult one?

ASANO. I know nothing of the ritual.

SHODA. That difficulty has been foreseen and arranged for. Your friend Lord Kira, will instruct you in the ritual.

ASANO. Lord Kira?

SHODA. Lord Kira, yes. He will receive you at any hour, the earlier the better, since the ceremony will be held at noon. He is expecting you now.

ASANO. Where is he waiting for us?

SHODA. At his palace. The Envoy's reception will take place in Lord Kira's palace.

ASANO. We will wait upon Lord Kira.

SHODA. I shall look forward to meeting you there after the ceremony. Good-bye till then.

KURANO. Good-bye. [SHODA *goes.*

ASANO. So Kira is to teach us the ritual, and I am to receive the Envoy in Kira's palace. The issue is joined indeed.

KURANO. It could not fall out better. You will front Kira and accuse him in his own house, before all the nobles of the province.

ASANO. I am troubled though. I am to be his pupil.

KURANO. I shall be with you. Come. The chess-board is set.

ASANO. Still, I am troubled. I feel that Kira has contrived this, for reasons that I cannot see. I wish that this had not happened.

KURANO. You will only meet Kira officially, for a prescribed ceremony. You will not even be the only pupil, for Lord Kamei will be learning with you.

ASANO. I have misgivings.

KURANO. All great things come from misgivings.

ASANO. Come then. It is time. Even at our wisest Fate uses us; and I shall be with you.

A messenger runs in.

THIRD RONIN. Lord Kurano. Lord Kurano. Your lady.

KURANO. What? What is it?

THIRD RONIN. Your lady has fallen, Lord Kurano, on the palace steps.

ASANO. Is she killed?

THIRD RONIN. Please God, no, my lord. But she calls for you and they think her dying.

ASANO. You must go. I will go on alone to Kira.

KURANO. If I can come, I will follow you.

ASANO. I trust you will find all well. Go now.

KURANO. Take me to where she is. [*Turning.*] Asano, promise me one thing.

ASANO. What?

KURANO. That you will be on your guard with Kira; that you will not let yourself be led away by him.

ASANO. I am playing for all these souls, Kurano. But who can promise for himself?

KURANO. You can and must. Do you understand? He may provoke you. Whatever the

provocation, be calm. May the gods guard you, Asano.

ASANO. They guard us. You, too.

KURANO. Please Heaven. I have misgivings now. I wish I were coming with you.

ASANO. We are being played by the gods. Go, now, quickly.

KURANO. Yes. Pray the gods I may follow quickly.

ASANO. Now hurry. I shall be late. [*They part and go off right and left.* ASANO *turns.*] Kurano. Good-bye, Kurano.

[*He watches* KURANO *go.*

CURTAIN

SCENE II—*The inner scene.*

KIRA. God of my fortunes, who hast brought me from being the steward's son to be Lord Kira. Now that the last enemy, Asano, is within the net, grant me thy intellectual power, that I may strike him to the ground. [*Comes forward.*] Then with jewels and dominations I shall go on. My power will stretch to the sea. There is no drunkenness like power. Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA *enters.*

SAGISAKA. My lord.

KIRA. Now the sun rises, friend.

SAGISAKA. Yes, my lord.

KIRA. You see you were wrong. That stroke on the valley-head prospered.

SAGISAKA. They will appeal, my lord.

KIRA. Yes, but meanwhile they have to learn the ritual. Have they come yet?

SAGISAKA. Asano and Kamei have come. They are outside.

KIRA. Tell me more of Kamei.

SAGISAKA. An honest, blunt man, wealthy, too; he has a pearl fishery.

KIRA. He is not a friend of Asano's?

SAGISAKA. They are said to be friendly.

KIRA. Nothing in the nature of allies?

SAGISAKA. No.

KIRA. Let us see these pupils.

[SAGISAKA *opens door.*

Enter KAMEI, HONZO, *and* ASANO.

KIRA. Who are you? Are you Lord Kamei?

KAMEI. Yes.

KIRA. Who is with you?

KAMEI. My attendant, Honzo.

KIRA. And this is Lord Asano. Is anyone with you?

ASANO. No, Lord Kira.

KIRA. You have come to me to learn the

ritual for the reception of the Emperor's Envoy. I have to tell you that the Envoy is even now within this palace, and that this is therefore a sacred place. I need not remind you that a place so hallowed exacts a reverence. My duty prescribes that I declare this room hallowed. Whoever breaks its peace, by violent act or oath, by blow or by the drawing of a weapon, is liable to the punishment of death, with confiscation of goods; so the Emperor's edict prescribes. You understand?

KAMEI. Yes.

KIRA. You, Lord Asano; do you understand?

ASANO. Perfectly.

KIRA. You have a look as though you did not understand so perfectly. Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. My lord?

KIRA. Are not these pupils very late?

SAGISAKA. They appeared to think not, at the door, my lord, but they are late, some twenty minutes.

KIRA. It is very annoying, that there should be so little care to be punctual. Give word for my cordial to be brought. [SAGISAKA *goes to the door.*] Why do you stand, sir, so near to the pupils?

HONZO. I am in attendance upon Lord Kamei.

KIRA. Your place is near the door, till you are wanted.

HONZO. I am sorry, my lord, I did not know.

[*The cordial enters.*

KIRA. And why do you come unattended?

ASANO. Lord Kurano, who was coming with me, was detained.

KIRA. What detained him?

ASANO. An accident to his wife.

KIRA. Give me the cordial there. [*Drinks.*] Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. My lord?

KIRA. Has any apology been received from this gentleman, for coming alone?

SAGISAKA. No, my lord.

ASANO. If an apology is necessary, let me state my regret now. Nothing but this sudden accident would have kept Lord Kurano from being present. I still hope that he may be here.

KIRA. Yes. But how am I to know that this accident is not merely an excuse to be away?

ASANO. I have the honour to tell you.

KIRA. Can you vouch for the accident or have you only heard of it?

ASANO. I heard of it, from a man on whose truth I can depend.

KIRA. "Truth" and "depend." And I have to depend on your dependence in condonation of your fault, which is tantamount to an impiety. Why did you bring no other friend, when you knew that Lord Kurano could not come?

ASANO. As I said, Lord Kira, I still hope that Lord Kurano may come here in time.

KIRA. You were not here in time yourself.

You have been guilty of great disrespect, both in coming late and in coming alone. Remove these cups. Ah, Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. My lord?

KIRA. What is the other person's name?

SAGISAKA. Kamei, my lord.

KIRA. Kamei. What made you late?

KAMEI. I was not late, Lord Kira.

KIRA. You will not improve your case by denial. You have heard this gentleman say that you are late.

KAMEI. He is not a gentleman.

SAGISAKA. They came on foot to the gate. The porter took them for beggars.

KIRA. I have heard, and the Envoy has heard, of new opinions in this province, of a want of respect for sacred things, of contempt for order, and distaste for duty. I grieve to find evidence of all these things in your behaviour to-day. You come late, you come improperly, unattended, dusty, and inclined to

rudeness. The Envoy will be pained to hear my report of you.

KAMEI. Lord Kira, we have come to learn the ritual from you. If, as you say, we are late, it might be well if you would confine yourself to that.

KIRA. You will remember this person's remarks.

SAGISAKA. Yes, my lord.

KIRA. I will read those letters if you will bring them to me. [*Reads.*] You may take this one, Sagisaka. [*Gives letter.*] This needs no answer. Asano, I have a letter here from my steward. He complains that in spite of the Judges' verdict yesterday your men still persist in occupying my pasture.

ASANO. Lord Kira, your steward is mistaken.

KIRA. That is not possible. Here is his letter.

ASANO. Do you depend upon his truth?

KIRA. I do.

ASANO. And I am to depend on your dependence in an accusation of the kind? Well, Lord Kira, all my men, without exception, have been in attendance at my house through the night.

KIRA. You will have to prove that.

ASANO. As you please.

KAMEI. Lord Kira, I have no concern with your private quarrels with Lord Asano; it is very painful to me to have to listen to them. I take it as a gross breach of privilege that you refer to them at all in your present position. I must ask you to perform the duty, for which I am in attendance; otherwise I must withdraw, to claim the respect not yet offered to me.

KIRA. As my pupil, you have neither the right to make remarks nor the power to withdraw. Within this Court you attend my instruction, at my pleasure, and obey my will at my bidding; that is your province as pupil;

I, as teacher, will attend to mine. If your gross ignorance and crass conceit mislead you, let me set you right; for I, here, Lord Kamei, represent a sacred Envoy, and will brook no babbling from a gray-haired country clown.

HONZO. For God's sake, stop him!

ASANO. Be quiet, Kamei; be quiet.

KAMEI. This man sat with my lackeys.

ASANO. I know, I know, but you are in his power if you stir.

KAMEI. The dog! The dog! I have seen him eat broken meats after the feast. I will not be quiet.

ASANO. You shall, Kamei, you shall not ruin yourself.

KIRA. Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. My lord?

KIRA. Request these people to be silent.

SAGISAKA. Be silent, you, and you.

KAMEI. What do you bid me?

KIRA [*rapping with his fan*]. Be silent, please. Prepare yourselves to learn the ritual.

Lord Kamei, you are the elder of my two pupils?

KAMEI. Yes.

KIRA. Come forward, please.

[KAMEI *advances.*

It is with your goodwill that you come to learn this ceremony?

KAMEI. What do you mean by that question? I am here.

KIRA. Do you come with your goodwill?

ASANO. Answer, man, answer.

HONZO. Say, yes, master, or it will be ruin, ruin.

KIRA. Will you two, to whom I am not speaking, keep farther back? Must I repeat my question, Lord Kamei? There is a prescribed form which I have to follow. I ask you, do you come here of your own will, freely?

ASANO. Say yes.

KAMEI. Yes, I do.

KIRA. Come nearer to me, Kamei.

KAMEI. I am here, Lord Kira.

KIRA. Kneel down, kindly. [KAMEI *kneels.*] Fasten my shoe for me.

KAMEI. Perhaps I do not understand you quite.

KIRA. The clasp of my shoe is loose, I ask you to clasp it.

KAMEI. Ask me?

KIRA. I tell you. Fasten it.

KAMEI. You tell me to fasten your shoe?

KIRA. Yes.

KAMEI. Then——

[*The door at the back opens with a clang.*

SHODA *appears.*

SHODA. Pardon my intrusion upon this office. I had the misfortune to interrupt you, Lord Kamei. The Envoy requests me to de-

sire your immediate presence, Lord Kira, if you will be so good as to go to him.

KIRA. Thank you. I break up this Court. Come, Sagisaka. [KIRA *and* SHODA *go out.*

SAGISAKA. Stay, you, till my lord returns. [*Exit.*

HONZO. Intolerable. It was intolerable.

KAMEI. That is the end, however.

ASANO. Kamei, you have been wonderful.

KAMEI. He went too far, Honzo.

HONZO. My lord, I thank God you kept the peace.

KAMEI. I shall keep it no longer. Give me that dirk you wear.

HONZO. What are you going to do, my lord?

ASANO. Do not give it, Honzo. Kamei, you have been right, up to this very last. We have only to keep calm through this; then we can appeal to the Envoy.

KAMEI. What has the Envoy to do with

this, Asano? This concerns my personal honour. The upstart told me to clasp his shoe-buckle. Give me your dirk, Honzo. [*Snatches the dirk.*]

HONZO. My lord, my lord.

ASANO. No, no, Kamei, no; you cannot claim a precedence. This concerns us three.

KAMEI. You were not told to handle his shoes. You are not an old man who has seen this dog fawning at his lackey's pantry for scraps and gobbets. You are a young man, with work, and you are an old man with sons. I am only an old man with a memory of what was, and I am going to kill that man.

ASANO. Kamei, Kamei, can you not see that a riot is what Kira wants? We two are his last rivals here. He has contrived all this to trap us; it is death if we lift a finger. If we endure this till the Envoy comes, we can appeal, and Kira will be degraded. Give me that dirk, for all our sakes.

KAMEI. Not I, Asano.

HONZO. Lord Kamei.

KAMEI [*putting them aside*]. My mind is made up.

HONZO. Master Kamei, I have served you many years now. I carried you when you were little, when I was a lad, pikeman to the Emperor. I promised the old knight, your father, that I would mind you, and I have, master, many's the time, and your sweet lady, my mistress, and the young knights, your sons. This lord is right, Master Kamei, it is a trap to bring you to death. I saw it in his look directly he began. I saw him smile when he touched you. Lord Kamei, it is not only your death that would follow if you struck him, but the beggary of your lady and her babes; and this lord is right, that you should bear till the Presence comes.

KAMEI. I will not bear.

HONZO. Then it is for me to save you, Lord Kamei; I will kill Lord Kira.

KAMEI. Please keep from me. If death is the penalty, I am ready for death.

Lord Asano, Honzo; I am grieved if I have spoken rudely to you. I count upon you not to interfere. Take these trappings, Honzo, and the purse. [*Gives things.*] Honzo, please go to the door, and tell me if Lord Kira is coming back.

HONZO [*at door*]. He is in the corridor, talking to a woman.

KAMEI. Is his guard there?

HONZO. No. Ah!

KAMEI. Is he coming?

HONZO. Yes.

KAMEI. Alone?

HONZO. No, the girl too.

KAMEI. On which side?

HONZO. The right.

KAMEI. I'll stand here, then.

HONZO [*speaking through*]. God deliver us. God deliver us.

KAMEI. Stand away, Honzo. Keep behind me.

HONZO. This is the end of it all; the end of everything.

KAMEI. Be quiet. Come, Kira.

HONZO. He's at the door.

KAMEI. Hush! Listen!

HONZO. Hark!

KAMEI. Quiet, Honzo.

ASANO. What is it?

KAMEI. He has gone past, I think.

HONZO. Please God.

KAMEI. Look, Honzo, softly.

HONZO [*at door*]. He is there.

KAMEI. Where?

HONZO [*pointing*]. There.

KAMEI. Just outside?

HONZO. His hand upon the latch.

KAMEI. Then make your peace, Kira.

KIRA [*as he half opens the door*]. That must wait till to-night.

A Woman's Voice. Yes, but there is another thing.

Kira. What can that be?

Voice. No, that shall wait till to-night, too.

Kira. No, you must tell me.

[*Closes door again. The* Voice *laughs.*

Kira [*off*]. You will not escape like that.

Kamei. Kiss your farewell to her.

Honzo. They are moving down the corridor.

Asano. She is singing.

Kamei. Look, Honzo. Look.

Honzo. They are there. She is gone now. He is coming.

Kamei. Quickly, then, behind me; farther back.

Asano. Now.

Honzo. Here.

Shoda *enters behind them quietly and goes to* Kamei.

Kamei [*thinking that he is* Honzo]. Keep

away, Honzo. Keep from me. I warn you. [*Turning.*] Who is this? Who are you? Ah, Lord Shoda.

SHODA. Lord Kamei, may I have the pleasure of waiting on you to your robing-room?

KAMEI. Ah, have I to robe?

SHODA. If you will forgive the trouble. You, too, Lord Asano.

ASANO. We have not yet been taught the ritual.

SHODA. That will be taught when you are robed. Will you come, then? These ceremonies are tedious; but the Envoy keenly looks forward to meeting you. This will be the way. Perhaps this gentleman will wait [*indicating* HONZO].

[*He takes out* ASANO *and* KAMEI.

HONZO [*kneeling*]. You gods who have granted me this moment's truce, help me to save my master.

Enter SAGISAKA. *The two eye each other.*

SAGISAKA. Well, fellow?

HONZO. Look.

SAGISAKA. What?

HONZO. This. It is my master's purse.

SAGISAKA. I suppose money is a rare sight where you come from?

HONZO [*jingling money*]. Could you get me a moment's private talk with Lord Kira, here, now, this very instant?

SAGISAKA. For you? What if I could?

HONZO [*jingling*]. This . . . to begin with.

SAGISAKA. Let me see it.

HONZO. When Lord Kira is here.

SAGISAKA. I want more than that.

HONZO. You shall have more, if you will bring him at once.

SAGISAKA. What do you want Lord Kira for?

HONZO. I will tell him when he comes. Only bring him.

SAGISAKA. I must have something to tell him.

HONZO. Say I must speak to him.

SAGISAKA. Must? Must speak? Well . . . [*Going.*] But if you want him, like this; no [*stops*]. I have myself to consider. I cannot fetch him till you have made it worth my while.

Enter KIRA

KIRA. Fetch whom?

HONZO. Lord Kira, will you grant me the favour of a moment's talk?

KIRA. A moment's talk?

SAGISAKA. He has been troubling me, my lord, with a great deal of nonsense about talking to you. He is foolish.

HONZO. It is for Lord Kamei, Lord Kira.

KIRA. For Lord Kamei? Lord Kamei can speak for himself.

HONZO. I am his treasurer, Lord Kira.

KIRA. Yes? What then?

HONZO. Might we be alone Lord Kira, for a moment only?

KIRA. Go, Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA [*passing* KIRA]. Have a care, my lord; he may be planning you a mischief for what you said to his master.

KIRA. What? You think that?

SAGISAKA. There is a strange look in his eyes.

KIRA. There is. You, man; put down that cloak you are carrying. What weapons have you in your sleeves?

HONZO. None, my lord.

KIRA. Feel him, Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. There is nothing, my lord. What have you done with your dirk?

HONZO. I lost it.

SAGISAKA. Yes, where you lost your wits, I think.

KIRA. Leave us then, Sagisaka. [*Exit* SAGISAKA, *back.*] Well, treasurer.

HONZO. Lord Kira, where we live we are not used to Court ceremony, so we sometimes offend. My master has asked me to say this, lest you should be annoyed at our country way. He, I mean we, have put you to a great deal of trouble in this matter of the ritual. If we might make some return, without offence, as a sign of how much we feel it; if you would not misunderstand.

KIRA. I shall not misunderstand a kind thought.

HONZO. We have heard that you collect jewels, Lord Kira.

KIRA. I have a few jewels.

HONZO. We in the country are sometimes able to help in the matter of jewels, what with the mines and the pearl-fishery. Lord Kamei thought that perhaps you might like to see these pearls.

KIRA. These are black pearls.

HONZO. Yes, your lordship might call them

black. We . . . we . . . we did not like to set them . . . as your lordship's taste is so well known. . . . If you would accept them from Lord Kamei, it would be a pleasure . . . as a return for your kindness, Lord Kira.

KIRA. This is very handsome of Kamei. I shall be very pleased to have them. They are very fine. There are few things so rare. I shall set them . . . how shall I set them?

HONZO. If your lordship cares for these things, Lord Kamei will be pleased to show you his collection.

KIRA. That is a pleasure we must arrange. Your name is Honzo, I think. I thank you, Honzo. But I think your master must be robed and we must proceed. Will you withdraw through that door, Honzo, while we go on? I thank you. I shall thank your master.

[HONZO *goes actors' left.* KAMEI *enters actors' right.*

KAMEI. Now, Kira.

KIRA. No, Lord Kamei, let me be before-

hand with you. See. I fling down my sword. I kneel to you. Listen. I ask your pardon for my rudeness.

KAMEI. You ask my pardon?

KIRA. Yes, for my gross insolence; I ask it kneeling. . . . My dear lord, let me congratulate you. You stood the test superbly.

KAMEI. You explain yourself.

KIRA. You do not know these rituals.

KAMEI. No. Nor wish to know more.

KIRA. You will perhaps understand, when I tell you that the early part of the teaching is designed to test the pupil's loyalty, his reverence for an Envoy's person, which it is important to know. You were wonderful. There can be few more loyal subjects than you. The Envoy, who was listening, was most pleased with you. And now you must forgive me, and allow me to say how pained I was to insult you in that way. Come, you must shake hands, and to-night you must honour me, you must be my guest.

KAMEI. Well. Say no more. There is my hand. You certainly put me to a test.

KIRA. Yes; it is a test. Sometimes in these rituals men who have not your marvellous forbearance are brought to the brink of murder.

KAMEI. Self-control is a great gift.

KIRA. To tell the truth, the test to-day was more strict than usual; for, between ourselves, there has been talk of disloyalty, new ideas, irreverence, in this province, and the good wheat is being sifted.

But, come, that unpleasantness is over. The ritual is simply this. Come with me here. [*Leads him actors' left.*] Your place will be here. You will be told when to come forward. Then you will . . . [*Whispers.*] You understand?

KAMEI. Is that all?

KIRA. Yes. I leave you now. And let me thank you very warmly for your charming con-

duct and willing pupilage. [*Shakes his hand, leaves him in prompt wings and returns to central stage.*] Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. My lord.

Enters.

KIRA. See that Lord Kamei's men are treated with every care.

SAGISAKA. Yes, Lord Kira.

KIRA. Has Lord Asano's friend come, this Kurano?

SAGISAKA. No, my lord.

KIRA. Is he in sight? Look and tell me.

SAGISAKA. There is a horseman on the road, riding fast.

KIRA. How far is he?

SAGISAKA. Three minutes; four . . .

KIRA. Is it likely to be Kurano?

SAGISAKA. It might be.

KIRA. Kurano is the wise man of the two; he is a man of sense?

SAGISAKA. He is said to have more than his master.

KIRA. I can wait three minutes. Put these pearls in the treasury. See that man Honzo well cared for; specially well.

SAGISAKA. Yes, my lord.

Have you as much time to spare as you think, my lord?

KIRA. I can wait two minutes more for Kurano.

SAGISAKA. That horseman does not seem to be coming here, my lord; he is turning off at the cross-roads; he is going towards the hills.

KIRA. Is anyone else in sight?

SAGISAKA. No. Very far away there is a horseman.

KIRA. How far?

SAGISAKA. Just come in sight, my lord, and walking.

KIRA. That would be ten minutes?

SAGISAKA. Quite, my lord.

KIRA. I cannot wait so long. I must go on. Let the other come; Asano.

[SAGISAKA *goes actors' right and opens door.*

SAGISAKA. Will you come in?

ASANO *enters.* SAGISAKA *goes out back.*

KIRA. Your friend has not come, Lord Asano.

ASANO. I am grieved. I fear his wife is badly hurt.

KIRA. I am sorry.

ASANO. I will tell him of your sympathy.

KIRA. What is that?

ASANO. I will tell him of your sympathy.

KIRA. Ah, yes.

But I regret his absence for another reason, which has nothing to do with an accident to a woman.

ASANO. Indeed.

KIRA. I presume that I may count upon his coming later?

ASANO. I cannot answer for him.

KIRA. I presume that I may count upon someone coming on your behalf, if not now at least in connection with your visit?

ASANO. No one will come on my behalf, Lord Kira.

KIRA. It is a great pity that Lord Kurano is not here; I fear you do not understand me.

ASANO. I understand you perfectly well, Lord Kira. You are hinting that you would like a bribe. I tell you frankly that you hint to the wrong man. I would not make you a present if you held my life in your hand. Now teach me the ritual, as you are bidden, and let me hear no more of hinting and presuming. You pollute this place and degrade your office.

KIRA. You misunderstand, Lord Asano; but you are right, we will proceed to the ritual. Come with me here. [*Leads him actors' right.*] Your place will be here. You will be told when to come forward. Then you will . . . [*Whispers.*] Do you understand?

ASANO. From here?

KIRA. Yes.

ASANO. It is not easy to do.

KIRA. Surely.

ASANO. Can I not rehearse it?

KIRA. The ceremony must begin. I will leave you here. [*He remains alone on the stage; goes slowly back.*] Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA [*entering*]. My lord?

KIRA. The hosts are instructed in their duty.

SAGISAKA. The Envoy is ready to proceed, Lord Kira.

KIRA. As he pleases.

Kneels. SAGISAKA *goes out,* NOBLES *enter.*

Be humble and prepare for the glory that has come among us.

The ENVOY *enters.*

VOICES. We give thanks for this mercy vouchsafed.

THE ENVOY. May peace be here; may righteousness be done here.

KIRA. Be it again declared, that he who breaks the peace or does unrighteousness within these walls, dies, as an outlaw, with the greater and lesser confiscations.

VOICES. Be it enacted as it is declared.

THE ENVOY. Who welcomes us in this holy place?

KIRA. Those whom the Presence has honoured, if it be so willed.

THE ENVOY. It is so willed.

The door, actors' left, opens. KAMEI *appears and performs his rite properly.*

KAMEI. I have the honour to welcome you.

THE ENVOY [*raising him to the seat at his right*]. We thank you for this welcome, which we well know proceeds from love.

Few things are so pleasant to us as this evidence of love for Him whom we all serve, and

the knowledge that all which you do for ourselves, great though it is, in the saving of pain as well as in the warmth of welcome, would be done in far fuller measure for Him, were He to be here.

Nor is it less pleasant to see again old rites and customs feelingly observed, and to remember the beautiful meaning hidden in them by the reverence of our fathers, by whom we live. For what we do here keeps alive what was passionate in the thought of our fathers; a thankful and holy task, which none but an impious man would slight or bring to mockery.

It is so willed.

The door (right) opens. ASANO *enters, advances on his knees, stumbling in his robes, and takes the* ENVOY'S *hands. The* NOBLES *laugh.*]

THE ENVOY. What is this outrage?

KIRA. What has possessed you, Asano?

THE ENVOY. Do you do this to insult me?

ASANO. Insult you? I do not understand.

KIRA. This is monstrous.

ASANO. I did as I was bid, my lord. [*Looking round, he sees all the* NOBLES *tittering.*] You planned this, Kira, to shame me.

KIRA. Do not aggravate your offence, Asano. Hold him, he will kill the Envoy.

ASANO. You shall not live to boast of it. [*Draws dirk and strikes at* KIRA.] Die, you.

NOBLES. Part them; quick, part them.

KAMEI. God, he has killed him.

ASANO. There, Kira.

SAGISAKA. No.

ASANO. Yes, I say.

SAGISAKA. Let go. I have you. Drop the dirk. Wrest it from him.

A VOICE. You shall not.

A VOICE. I have it. No, Lord Asano, come.

KIRA. Oh! remember, remember; this is a holy place.

KAMEI. Lord Kira is bleeding.

KIRA. Never mind me, look to the Envoy. He stabbed at the Envoy.

KAMEI. Hold him, he is fainting.

A VOICE. Fetch water. He has been stabbed to the brain.

KAMEI. Lean on me, Lord Kira.

THE ENVOY. Is he dead?

KAMEI. Blind with the blood, I think, my lord. It is a cut along the brow. Have you a cloth? The cloth, there!

A VOICE. This is a terrible thing, Lord Asano.

THE ENVOY. Little did I think that I should live to see new principles lead to so blasphemous a sacrilege. I suspend this Court. Let the wound be dressed. How bad is the wound?

KAMEI. A shallow cut, my lord.

A VOICE. The knife must have slipped, or it would have killed him.

THE ENVOY. See to it, Shoda. Where is this man?

KIRA. My lord, although his aim was to make it seem that I had not taught him the ceremony, and afterwards perhaps to kill me, I make no charge against him. He has been at law with me and is prejudiced and passionate; I think not really wicked. As far as any injury has been done to me, I ask for his pardon, my lord.

THE ENVOY. That well becomes you, Lord Kira. I wish that I could grant a pardon. Take him, Shoda, before the cut stiffens.

[KIRA *is led out.*]

This outlaw, now. It is Asano, is it not?

ASANO. Yes, lord.

THE ENVOY. Asano, if you are not still blind with passion, listen to me.

Perhaps even now you do not understand your position.

ASANO. I understand it.

THE ENVOY. That I am thankful for; because you stand upon the brink of ruin.

I wish that, as Lord Kira asks, it were possible to pardon you. But society is held together solely by the chain of order, and to weaken a link of that chain is to bring in chaos. Think of what you have done, and of what you have outraged, but do not think, for a moment, that your sin can be lightly punished.

ASANO. The net was set for me and I am caught. I am too wise, my lord, to appeal against the machine of this world, against the strong, unscrupulous man and old custom. I have outraged both. But I should not have outraged either had not something higher been outraged, something here in me. Well, you have me.

THE ENVOY. You do not realise your offence, Asano. Your sin is that of blasphemous, sacrilegious passion, shedding blood upon consecrated ground. I will consider your case.

Remove him. Bring him to a sense of how he stands. Stay, Lord Kamei.

[*All go, save* KAMEI.

He is an intemperate man, I fear. Do you know him?

KAMEI. He is a gentle, quiet man, my lord.

THE ENVOY. He is a free thinker, they tell me.

KAMEI. I cannot answer for a man's thoughts, my lord.

THE ENVOY. You can deplore what they lead to, I hope.

KAMEI. My lord, we are all subject to passion. Kira so insulted me this morning, that I was on the verge of killing him.

THE ENVOY. The verge is the line between man and devil, and men keep within it. Leave me. [KAMEI *goes.* *A pause.*

A YOUTH *enters.*

THE YOUTH. I beg pardon, my lord.

THE ENVOY. What is it?

THE YOUTH. I was to cense the room, my lord.

[*A pause.*

THE ENVOY. Boy.

THE YOUTH. Yes, my lord.

THE ENVOY. Do you believe in God?

THE YOUTH. Yes, sir.

THE ENVOY. Would you forgive a man who had broken the peace in the house of God?

THE YOUTH. Broken it, my lord?

THE ENVOY. Yes, drawn a knife there and tried to kill a man.

THE YOUTH. It would depend on what the other man had done.

THE ENVOY. Say that the other man had insulted him and made a mock of him?

THE YOUTH. That's a hard case, my lord.

THE ENVOY. Would you forgive him or would you put him to death?

THE YOUTH. My lord, it's a hard case; I would forgive him.

THE ENVOY. Why?

THE YOUTH. No man would do a thing like that unless there was excuse.

THE ENVOY. So you would forgive him. Freely?

THE YOUTH. As I would hope to be forgiven myself, my lord.

THE ENVOY. Ah! Will you find Lord Shoda for me? He is outside there. [*The* YOUTH *goes. Pause.* SHODA *comes.*] Shoda, I have considered this case. Order the other ministrants to leave the precincts.

SHODA. Very well, my lord. Shall I bring the prisoner to you?

THE ENVOY. Not yet. See that Lord Kamei goes.

SHODA. I will, my lord.

THE ENVOY. When you go, please order the room here to be laid with mattings.

[*Exit at actors' left.*

SHODA. I will give order, my lord.

The YOUTH *enters to cense the room.*

THE YOUTH [*censing*].

One and two and three
Sweet spirits sweeten me;
With thy precious grace
Be about this place;
Let Fate with the dark star
Be . . .

Enter KURANO *at back.*

KURANO. Is the Court broken up?

THE YOUTH. Sir?

KURANO. Is the Court broken up? Are they dining?

THE YOUTH. One went there, my lord, to that room, and the other lords went there; but I do not know, my lord, I am not one of the household.

KURANO. Ah! [*Enter, back, two men, with white mattings, who cross to front and prepare the seppuku.*] Where is the Court now? Can

you tell me? [*The men do not answer.*] What is this? [*Enter* KAMEI.] Ah, here is Kamei. Is the Court over?

KAMEI. Yes, it is. Your friend, Asano, has done a mad thing.

KURANO. What?

KAMEI. He was mad, Kurano. He performed the ceremony like a madman and the people laughed. He drew his dirk and struck Kira in the face.

KURANO. Then Kira taught him the wrong ritual.

KAMEI. That is incredible.

KURANO. Things are, till they happen. What is being done?

KAMEI. I do not know. I have been ordered to go.

KURANO. Is he in arrest? Of course he is. Where is Kira?

KAMEI. Gone to have the wound dressed.

KURANO. Which way, though?

KAMEI. You cannot set upon Kira in his own house.

KURANO. He must set this right. You boy, where is Kira? I should have been here from the first: my wife's unhurt. I galloped to catch you, but the horse went lame. Which door, you, to Kira's rooms? Lord Kira's rooms?

THE YOUTH. One of these doors, my lord. I do not know which.

KURANO. Come, Kamei. We must find either Kira or the Envoy. Come. [*He goes to door at back, just as it is flung open. Enter the* ENVOY, SHODA, ASANO *under guard,* SAGISAKA, *and* NOBLES.] My lord, I beg for the privilege of a moment's speech with you.

THE ENVOY. I have a painful duty here, sir, which makes it impossible.

ASANO. I am condemned to kill myself, Kurano. I am going to death, now, for striking Kira.

KURANO. Good God! My lord, I protest against this sentence.

THE ENVOY. You protest?

ASANO. Kurano, do not ruin yourself for my sake.

A GUARD. Come, sir; stand aside.

ASANO. I am ruined and the estate confiscated; that is enough. Let the ruin end with me.

KURANO. My lord, I appeal. Any crime is sometimes justified, and I appeal now for my friend. The whole ritual was irregular, he was unattended, I was not with him.

THE ENVOY. He is condemned for sacrilege, Kurano.

KURANO. My lord, I know. But I know this man. He could not have committed sacrilege. I say that Kira wilfully taught him the wrong ritual to make him a mock; and that was the only sacrilege committed here, and in striking Kira he punished it. I claim a

reversal of your sentence and judgment on Kira.

THE ENVOY. Arrest this man. No, no, loose him. Stand from him.

Have you any evidence to support your statement against Lord Kira?

KURANO. None, my lord. Only my knowledge of my friend and Kira's hate.

THE ENVOY. Sacrilege is a sin against the Divine; the question of human provocation does not apply. I am being very merciful to you, Lord Kurano, because I am an old man and know the value of life. Do not force me to remember that I have a peculiar power.

I uphold the sacredness of my master, and administer His law, as an old man soon to be judged himself.

Will you be silent here, in this place of death, or must I take order?

KURANO. Nothing that I say, or do, can save my friend?

THE ENVOY. Nothing.

KURANO. I have duties to the living, then. I will be silent, my lord.

ASANO. May I speak with him?

THE ENVOY. It is not usual to grant speech.

KURANO. It is not an usual case, my lord.

THE ENVOY. You may speak for one minute, then.

ASANO. Alone?

THE ENVOY. The minute has begun.

KURANO. My dear man.

ASANO. Well, Kurano, the gods make pawns of us.

KURANO. Kira taught you the wrong ritual?

ASANO. Yes.

KURANO. You will not go unavenged. And the confiscation? Who takes the land?

ASANO. It will go to the Crown, I fear. I pray Kira will not get it. I have played badly for those who trusted to me.

KURANO. This is the gambit only. What can I do for you or say for you?

ASANO. Nothing; I know you'll do everything. There is one thing——

KURANO. What?

ASANO. That woman whom I hoped to marry. No. She belongs to the past. I can think of nothing.

KURANO. There is no need where one loves.

ASANO. There are strange thoughts rising in me about the ways of the gods.

Kurano, one thing . . . about Kira. You spoke of vengeance . . . before that . . . Listen. Try to stop the confiscation.

THE ENVOY. The minute is past.

ASANO. Remember, Kurano, before all that . . . appeal . . . get the inheritance for my brother. Remember.

A GUARD. Come this way, Lord Kurano.

KURANO. I will remember. [*He is led off.*

ASANO. Sometimes, in wintry springs,
Frost, on a midnight breath,
Comes to the cherry flowers
And blasts their prime;
So I, with all my powers
Unused on men or things,
Go down the wind to death,
And know no fruiting-time.

[*He kneels on the white mat and takes up the dirk.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE—*The outer scene.*

A VOICE. Lord Asano is long at his honours. Is that he?

A VOICE. No, not yet.

VOICES. No. Hazama has gone up the road to see if he is coming. He must be here soon.

FIRST RONIN. The Envoy may have kept him.

A VOICE. There. There he comes. He is coming.

VOICES. Welcome home from your honours, Lord Asano.

SECOND RONIN. It is not he; not yet; but he cannot be long.

FIRST RONIN. Very often the Envoy keeps them.

VOICE. Whatever honour he wins they will not honour him so much as we do.

SECOND RONIN. He has been our guardian and our friend.

A VOICE. How long it seems.

FIRST RONIN. Sometimes the Envoy feasts them; in fact, usually.

A VOICE. Here is Hazama. He is coming.

VOICES. Asano, welcome!

VOICES. Where? Show me. I see Kurano.

VOICES. Welcome!

Enter HAZAMA

Welcome! Welcome!

HAZAMA. No, no! no, no! Hush!

VOICES. Asano!

HAZAMA. Quiet!

VOICES. Asano. Welcome! Welcome!

HAZAMA. Hush. Quiet! Still!

VOICES. Asano. Asano!

HAZAMA. It is not he, I tell you. It is Lord Kurano.

VOICES. Kurano! It is Kurano. Welcome.

Kurano. Kurano! Carry him. We'll carry him home.

HAZAMA. Still, everybody!

VOICES. Here comes Kurano, etc.

Enter KURANO

HAZAMA. Here comes Lord Kurano. Welcome him home to us.

VOICES. Kurano. Welcome back to us, Lord Kurano!

KURANO. Stop this noise. Have this noise stopped, Hazama.

VOICES. Kurano and Asano forever. Welcome! etc.

KURANO. Let them, for God's sake, stop. Silence, I say.

HAZAMA. Still, still! Still a moment!

VOICES. Friends forever. Our friends forever. Hush. Quiet.

KURANO. Come round me here.

VOICES. He has something to say.

THIRD RONIN. Would you taste our wine, lord?

HAZAMA. Wait till he has spoken.

KURANO. Kneel down.

HAZAMA. What is it, master?

KURANO. Your master Asano is dead.

HAZAMA. For God's sake, master!

VOICES. Dead? In God's name! Our master? What killed him?

A VOICE. What was it he said? I did not hear.

A VOICE. That our master Asano is dead.

FIFTH RONIN. O desolation!

FIRST RONIN. That death should happen like this, going to an honour!

HAZAMA. If I might ask it, master, how did he come by his end?

KURANO. By a knife.

FIRST RONIN. By an accident, then, was it?

KURANO. No.

THIRD RONIN. Was no one there? Did no one see?

KURANO. I saw. There were many looking on.

HAZAMA. Was he murdered?

KURANO. My friends, he was condemned to death. He killed himself.

ALL. Oh! Oh, God!

KURANO. This is the knife. This, here. This killed your master.

VOICES. Look, if there isn't his blessed blood on it. O Master Kurano! Poor soul. Poor blessed saint!

HAZAMA. My master that raised me, done to death like a thief!

KURANO. Done to death, by Kira. Goaded to it. Hounded to it till it passed bounds, when he struck Kira and was condemned.

HAZAMA. Kira is dead, then?

KURANO. No, alive; scarcely hurt.

HAZAMA. Then come, all of us, we'll burn him in his house.

KURANO. Wait. That could only be death. Kira has borrowed guards. His house is surrounded by them.

HAZAMA. We will wait till the guards are gone.

KURANO. You see this paper? You hold an Envoy sacred?

VOICES. Yes, indeed.

KURANO. This is an Envoy's decree. I am charged by the Envoy to read it to you. I will read it:

"Those are to declare that anyone who endeavours in any way to avenge Lord Asano or to hinder the transfer of the estate will put himself without the law and will be punished by instant death, with confiscation of goods."

You see, nothing but ruin can come of any protest or act; nothing but death; and you are married men, with wives and children, or young men with parents to keep. If you lift a finger

to avenge our friend, it can only wreck yourselves and them. You must submit.

VOICES. We had rather die. No, no! We will not submit.

KURANO. I knew him well; better than you. He was very dear to me. You have your wives and children to think of. You must remember those; they have a claim upon you. But to me, he comes first.

A VOICE. And to us, master.

KURANO. No, no! You must remember what I have read to you, and the ruin of your families.

VOICES. We're ruined as it is. Kira shall die. Die, now. Lead us against him, you.

We can never be in better state to avenge him.

KURANO. No, no! Wait. Before we deal with Kira we must fulfil Asano's dying wish.

VOICES. What was that, master?

KURANO. To save the estates for the rightful heir.

I can only appeal for that if you obey this edict. [*Murmurs.*] You must obey it.

VOICES. We will not.

KURANO. It is his last word to me.

VOICES. We must kill Kira.

KURANO. You cannot kill Kira. We may stop his getting these estates, which you may be sure he aims for. And there is another thing. A shameful thing. [*Murmurs.*] Our master is denied burial. [*Cries.*] He is sentenced to a criminal's grave. If we can stop the confiscation, we may remove that slur, too. Wait till these appeals are judged, before you think of revenge. But more news comes. . . .

Enter FOURTH RONIN

VOICES. Who is this? It's the widow's boy from up by the ford. What is it?

FOURTH RONIN. Lord Kurano.

KURANO. Yes. What?

FOURTH RONIN. Our Lord Asano is killed and all our land is to be Kira's.

KURANO. Yes.

FOURTH RONIN. Kira's guards are moving in from the valley-head already, to turn us out. Hundreds of them are coming. Look there, lord, you can see the flames. They have burnt my old mother's house. They have orders to burn every house and occupy the whole province. There are horsemen with them, herding the stock; they are taking and destroying everything.

KURANO. It has begun, then.

FOURTH RONIN. They are going to scatter us so that we shall not avenge our master.

But that is nothing, Lord Kurano. I was in a barn, among the straw, and I heard the troopers talking. They are coming for you, they said, for you are the leader.

KURANO. Are they going to kill me?

FOURTH RONIN. They said they were going to make sure of you. They will kill you if you show a sign against them, Lord Kurano. I have run to beg you to hide.

KURANO. I will not hide. But you see now, you see how little hope there is.

But in the few moments left to us, before we are scattered, shall we not make a pact together, that we'll avenge our friend?

VOICES. Ay, we will. We will indeed.

KURANO. Let me trap no one. There will be no feasting in this fellowship; only a wandering in the cold, perhaps for months, and death at the end, according to this decree. Understand solemnly that the man who puts hand on mine marks himself for death.

VOICES. We will come, Lord Kurano.

VOICES. We know what the end will be.

VOICES. One has to pay a price in this world. We are ready to pay this, Lord Kurano.

KURANO. Come about me.

Here is the relic of our friend. Let us swear together, on this relic, to avenge his death.

VOICES. Yes, master.

KURANO. I speak, then, for each man here. I will avenge your death, Asano, lord and master, on the person of Kira Kots'ke, or die in the task, and to this I consecrate my life. Will you swear to this?

VOICES. I swear. I swear. So be it. I swear. I, too, swear. I make oath to this. I put my hand to this. May my name perish if I fail in this. I swear. I, too, swear. I vow this solemnly, Lord Asano. I swear, etc.

KURANO. Now swear, too, that you will avenge him only as I bid you, and when I bid you.

HAZAMA. You are our captain, Lord Kurano.

VOICES. We swear that we will obey you faithfully.

KURANO. Then it will not be, and must not be, till after the suits are heard.

All is done, then; but to say good-bye. We have no home here, henceforth; we are ronin and wanderers.

Scatter, now, through the province, wander and wait; that is all that we can do; his spies will be on us.

Now comes the bad time when you will be tried, and I have only one word to say to you: Endure. Endure all things, all things; lest we lose our revenge.

HAZAMA. And you, Lord Kurano, Kira will want to kill you.

KURANO. Yes, he will want to kill me.

HAZAMA. Will you stay here, lord, when his soldiers are coming? Come with us, master, for safety's sake.

KURANO. I have my own part to play here.

Dismiss, then. And believe nothing that men say of me.

But, I give you no hope, remember; nor any word but endure. Perhaps some day he will

dismiss his guards . . . and then . . . justice may be done . . . if there is justice. Now go.

[*They go out, leaving him alone. The* GIRL *remains.*

KURANO. What are you?

GIRL. Nobody.

KURANO. What is your name?

GIRL. Wild Cherry.

KURANO. What are you doing here?

GIRL. I came over for the feast.

KURANO. There will be no feast.

GIRL. I hate Kira.

KURANO. It is very wrong to hate people.

GIRL. You don't see them so close as I do.

KURANO. True.

GIRL. I like wine.

KURANO. There is plenty here. Drink.

GIRL. I like you.

KURANO. How old are you?

GIRL. Old enough.

KURANO. You ought to be with your lover, child.

GIRL. Ah! I've a lover, haven't I?

KURANO. Was your lover killed?

GIRL. Yes, Kira hanged him. I'd have been married but for that. Now I don't much care.

This yellow wine is nice.

KURANO. You good gods.

GIRL. You'll get past that stage. Was it a friend of yours that was killed?

KURANO. Yes.

GIRL. Was that through Kira?

KURANO. Yes.

GIRL. We ought to be friends, we two. You take it too seriously; I did at first. What is the use of sorrowing? It won't bring him back. Had your friend fair hair?

KURANO. No, girl; dark.

GIRL. Mine was fair. This was some of it. Of course, I'm the lowest of the low, but I've

always kept some of it; then one doesn't feel so low.

KURANO. I shall kill Kira.

GIRL. I thought I would at first; but one cannot kill Kira. Besides, what is the use? It won't make it any better. Nothing makes it better, except wine. They do charge us for wine. You ought not to complain; you have all this for nothing.

KURANO. Give me some.

GIRL. I'll try some of the red.

I'm sorry about your friend. It makes one so savage and all the time one is helpless. Here's a lady.

KURANO. It is my wife. Sit still. Give me some wine.

GIRL. Now I shall get beaten and then they'll fine me especially if my sash is torn.

KURANO. Hand me that bowl; thank you.

LADY K. Kurano.

KURANO. What do you want with Kurano?

LADY K. Who is this?

KURANO. My sister.

LADY K. What has happened?

KURANO. Asano is killed.

LADY K. I felt that it would end like that. Thank God, it was not you.

KURANO. Do not thank God yet. Why did you lie to me?

LADY K. When did I lie to you?

KURANO. This morning. You lied and made others lie.

LADY K. This is a strange language. I do not understand. What do you mean, Kurano?

KURANO. You sent word to me this morning that you had fallen on the steps?

LADY K. I did fall.

KURANO. And that you were dying.

LADY K. No. My message was simply "Come. Come quickly."

KURANO. The messenger said that you were dying.

LADY K. I do not know what the messenger may have said.

KURANO. You scared the messenger.

LADY K. He was concerned for me. Were not you?

KURANO. Too deeply—God!

LADY K. What is the matter, Kurano? Why do you speak to me in this way?

KURANO. You were not hurt this morning?

LADY K. I was hurt and shaken, and I am faint and sick still.

KURANO. Not to that point.

LADY K. Will you not even ask me how I am?

KURANO. No.

LADY K. Oh, you are cruel to me.

KURANO. Do you know that if you had not recalled me, I should have been with Asano to-day? And then all this would not have happened, and he would be alive now.

LADY K. That is ignoring Fate. Who can measure causes and results?

KURANO. I can measure that.

LADY K. Your place was beside your wife, Kurano.

KURANO. Only while my wife is worthy. No, do not weep, do not cry out; I know you. Your fall was a trick to keep me.

LADY K. Can you think, after twenty years, that I should stoop to trick?

KURANO. Yes.

LADY K. Is it not rather terrible to you that a woman should be forced to trick, after twenty years?

Listen, then. I did trick. I did it to save you. I knew where Asano was dragging you in his mad opposition to Kira. I knew that he would ruin himself and you, too, and that to-day would decide it. So I saved you, Kurano.

KURANO. And my friend lies down in the dust.

The blood runs along the ground and soaks in, and then the brain cannot think and the hand cannot do, and twenty years' work is a memory. You killed Asano and do not even know what he was.

LADY K. I loved Asano. I loved your friendship with him. I know how you have worked together. I knew his nobleness. But I knew that if he were twenty times as noble he would still not be worth your little finger. You are too generous, Kurano, where you love, and too blind.

KURANO. Asano is blind. [*He rises.*

LADY K. What are you going to do, Kurano?

KURANO. Drink.

LADY K. Will you not take me home?

KURANO. I have no home. The "mad opposition" is over now; Kira is master here. Do you hear, you, who admired Kira so? Go and make your peace with him. I am going.

LADY K. Where?

KURANO. Where beaten men go.

LADY K. I am your wife, Kurano.

KURANO. You were.

LADY K. I am your wife; more than that, I am your loving wife. Dear, I am all shaken and strange. Say a kind word to me. You will, I know you will; you would never do an unkind thing.

I know that I am nothing beside Asano; but now that he is dead, I could help a little. I want the world to know how noble and wonderful my husband is.

KURANO. Those are words; drink, and a dirk in the ribs, are my future.

LADY K. Then I had better go and drown myself.

KURANO. It would be better.

LADY K. Oh!

KURANO. I am giving you good advice. You're harmless, as women go, what is called virtuous, loving, wise. Go and drown yourself.

Kira is coming. Asano was all that, yet it ended in him killing himself. You virtuous are lost in such a world. Go drown or drink; then you'll be spared things.

LADY K. That is not the language we have faced the world with these twenty years. Dear, do not drive me away like this. Let us face it together. I do not mind for myself, but you are lost somewhere and I want to be by you. You cannot put twenty years' life together so lightly aside. Think of our children and our times together. Dear, I beg you not to put me away. I am ill, dear, and faint, and I cannot bear this. We'll plan what we can do against Kira. This is so unfitting, it is breaking my heart.

KURANO. Drink this, then, and forget it; drink.

LADY K. It is not a little thing that you are putting away, Kurano.

KURANO. I am thirsty, and I am weary of you; besides, this is my sister.

LADY K. I will not interrupt you, Kurano.

[*Exit.*

GIRL. Was that really your wife?

KURANO. Yes, poor soul.

GIRL. You oughtn't to have driven her away, like that.

KURANO. Why, the thing has come to an end.

GIRL. Still, she hadn't hurt your friend, had she?

KURANO. She? No.

It is twenty-one years, to a day, that we first joined hands. [*He covers his face.*] Now I shall not see her again.

Stand up there, you, and tell me what you see?

GIRL. Nothing but the fields.

KURANO. Look along the road, towards Kira's country.

GIRL. Yes, there is something burning. It is moving.

KURANO. Those are torches. I thought he would be coming soon. It is Kira coming to take possession here.

GIRL. Is that beast coming here?

KURANO. Yes. Give me some more wine.

GIRL. I'm afraid.

KURANO. Drink. It is not so bad, this life of ours, while one has this. Can you dance?

GIRL. Not if Kira is coming here.

KURANO. I can dance. I've a good mind to try. I can dance stately dances and gay dances; and I can sing.

GIRL. Don't you anger Kira.

KURANO. I tell you I can sing. I'm going to sing.

GIRL. Don't, I say, don't. You don't know Kira. He is terrible. You take me away somewhere. It will be death if you stay here talking all this folly.

KURANO. Why do you make that noise when I say I'm going to sing? You have never

heard me sing. The roses turn to me, when I sing. The birds in the air turn. There was a song I made when my friend came home; that was the friend who was killed. But I won't sing that, that was too sad; I want a merry song; for what is the use of being sad? Come you and sing.

GIRL. You are mad.

KURANO. Listen to me, now. Is not this well sung?

Fate with her changing tune
Keeps her appointed time,
Her ever breaking thread,
For ever spinning.
We, who are singing, soon
Will cease to rhyme,
Our moment will be sped. . . .

What comes next? Hark! Did you hear footsteps?

GIRL. It's the torches. Don't let them catch me here.

KURANO. Sit still and drink. Come here to me.

GIRL. No, I'm going, I'll not stay. You don't know what soldiers are.

KURANO. You are my dear and my delight and now we will sing together.

Yellow wine in a silver bowl
Is true contentment to the soul.
A dancing girl with brilliant eyes
Is true contentment to the wise.
O friends, rejoice, for man is meant.

Enter KIRA'S *guards with* SAGISAKA

SAGISAKA. This is the man we have come to see.

KURANO. Who are you and what do you want? Let me finish my song.

To, what is it, man is meant?
To dance and sing and be content.

This is my sister. You haven't told me yet who you are.

SAGISAKA. Pay attention to all he says, Captain. You know me well enough.

KURANO. I do. You are Lord Kira's wife.

SAGISAKA. I——

KURANO. Are not you?

SAGISAKA. No, I am not.

KURANO. I get puzzled, seeing you so much together. This is very excellent wine.

SAGISAKA. I did not come to drink, Lord Kurano.

KURANO. It's the most innocent of the vices.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARDS. Is this the man?

SAGISAKA. Yes.

CAPTAIN. He seems a drunken fellow.

SAGISAKA. He is less drunken than he seems.

CAPTAIN. I am not sure. Come and drink, come and drink, my friend. There is nothing like drink.

KURANO. You're a reasonable being. It is the one friend. Here's one for you.

Is that your friend?

CAPTAIN. Yes.

KURANO. He is an ugly one.

CAPTAIN. He was kicked in the face by a mule when he was young.

KURANO. Do not make fun of me.

CAPTAIN. It is the truth; isn't it?

SAGISAKA. But now I do the kicking.

KURANO. I don't like you.

SAGISAKA. That's unfortunate, for you'll perhaps see a good deal of me in the near future.

KURANO. Shall we drink together?

SAGISAKA. No.

KURANO. Then if you won't drink you're a dog and an unbelieving dog and the mule-shewed sense. What do you come here for, if not to drink?

CAPTAIN. Humour a drunkard.

SAGISAKA. I come to take over these estates, which are forfeited by that friend of yours.

KURANO. Is your friend Kira going to have them?

SAGISAKA. Yes.

KURANO. Is Kira in want of a man, for I shall be out of employment.

SAGISAKA. Kira does not employ drunkards.

KURANO. Who says I am a drunkard?

CAPTAIN. Never mind what my friend says. He does not know you.

KURANO. Do you dare to call me a drunkard?

SAGISAKA. I'll dare more than that, when this first month is over.

CAPTAIN. He calls you a gentleman.

KURANO. So I am a gentleman.

CAPTAIN. We are all gentlemen.

KURANO. Don't let him call me a drunkard then.

CAPTAIN. Come, we are all friends; and this is your sister. Is your name Cherry?

KURANO. Her name's my sister

CAPTAIN. I had a sister like her once.

KURANO. Then you had more than you deserve.

CAPTAIN. I had. She cost me six months' pay.

KURANO. I like you. We shall be friends. Shall we make him drunk?

CAPTAIN. No, it would kill him.

KURANO. Never mind.

CAPTAIN. It would be difficult.

KURANO. No. We would throw him down and pour the wine down his throat. Shall we?

CAPTAIN. Yes. Yes.

KURANO. You take his heels.

GIRL. Yes.

KURANO. We will.

CAPTAIN. Yes, but wait a moment.

KURANO. No, not wait.

CAPTAIN. Yes; first let us all three be drunk.

KURANO. Roaring drunk?

CAPTAIN. Roaring and raging drunk.

KURANO. All be drunk.

I'll be drunk. You'll be drunk. She'll be drunk. We'll be drunk, you'll be drunk, he'll be drunk. We'll all be drunk. Let us see who'll be drunk first. Here's yours, here's yours. I don't want to be drunk, I want to dance. Kira is coming here, so we shall be friends, you and I will be friends.

You think I've been against Kira; I'm his best friend and your best friend, so let us dance.

SAGISAKA. You shall dance to-morrow.

KURANO. I want to dance now. My sister will dance with me.

GIRL. Oh, loose me, do! I'll get fined ever so if the stuff is rumpled.

KURANO. I tell you, we will dance. Come here. We will move those mats to one side. Are you coming to dance?

CAPTAIN. Yes; dance, yes, as soon as ever you have moved the mats.

KURANO. I like you. Are you a good dancer?

CAPTAIN. Not so good as you.

KURANO. I am a good dancer, am not I?

CAPTAIN. Excellent. Let me see you dance the sword dance.

KURANO. Shall we pour the wine on our heads first?

CAPTAIN. No, afterwards, when we are hot.

KURANO. But we will?

CAPTAIN. Yes. Oh yes.

KURANO. Yes, we will pour the wine on our heads. We are going to pour the wine on our heads.

SAGISAKA. I would.

KURANO [*to* GIRL]. I'll pour it on yours and then we'll dance. Sometimes I am sad, for all my merrymaking. It is not such an easy world. There is a fellow, Death, who is a danger, if

one could find him. I had a friend once; my head is all in a whirl; a very dear friend; I could weep when I think what happened to him. It was Death who took him away. I would like to go to look for Death.

CAPTAIN. Your sister will bring you to him.

KURANO. Yes, so they say; all have told me that.

I will go look for Death, for Death is everywhere,
Putting his hands on friends and dulling women's hair.
Death took away my friend; and I have prayed for years,
But Death has paid no heed. Death does not yield to tears.

CAPTAIN. Death is like that.
You should drink again.

KURANO. There is no wine strong enough.
But we will find him, some day.

SAGISAKA. He may be nearer than you think.

KURANO. You look like a friend of his. I have known wise, beautiful people; but Death did not care. [*To* GIRL.] We will go away, we two; I do not like these people; they think only of themselves. We, who have lost friends, are in another world.

We know how many miles the soul can tread,
We who go seeking signs from dear companions dead.

Come, girl, we'll go. Poor child, you are cold. We'll knock at the doors for shelter. [*Exit.*

CAPTAIN. There is no doubt about him, poor fellow.

SAGISAKA. I am not so sure.

CAPTAIN. He is both drunk and mad.

SAGISAKA. I would like to see him sober.

CAPTAIN. I was sorry for him. This death of his friend has turned his brain.

SAGISAKA. It had better remain turned. Did you feel that he was drunk?

CAPTAIN. Yes.

SAGISAKA. And mad, you said?

CAPTAIN. Yes, both.

SAGISAKA. He is an object of pity, a martyr. He is dangerous, so.

CAPTAIN. He could be shut up, if he should become that.

SAGISAKA. That would make him still more a martyr.

CAPTAIN. What is he doing, now? I cannot see.

SAGISAKA. He'll come back. Captain.

CAPTAIN. Yes?

SAGISAKA. I believe he is pretending.

CAPTAIN. He pretends unusually well, then.

SAGISAKA. Captain, can you take a hint?

CAPTAIN. Yes.

SAGISAKA. He would be better out of the way.

CAPTAIN. I've no orders about that; that is life and death.

SAGISAKA. Kira would be grateful.

CAPTAIN. I've no means of knowing that.

SAGISAKA. I will answer for so much.

CAPTAIN. Do you order me to kill him?

SAGISAKA. Come, these are harsh words, Captain; "order" and "kill."

CAPTAIN. It's a harsh subject.

SAGISAKA. Supposing he were to talk in his cups, excitedly, provocatively. . . . Or rave against us . . . inciting to riot. . . .

CAPTAIN. Well, what then? I could only arrest him for . . . being drunk . . . or out of his mind.

SAGISAKA. Of course. . . . What more could you do? You would arrest him.

CAPTAIN. That would not help you.

SAGISAKA. Supposing he were to resist arrest, to struggle with you, or to try to get away?

CAPTAIN. The guard would bind him.

SAGISAKA. If he were violent. One of them might . . . in self-defence?

CAPTAIN. I see what you mean.

SAGISAKA. Kira would not forget it.

CAPTAIN. You want him killed?

SAGISAKA. It would be easier with him away.

CAPTAIN. I see.

SAGISAKA. Kira is thinking of putting you in command here.

CAPTAIN. Ah!

SAGISAKA. Can I trust you to carry out Kira's wishes?

CAPTAIN. The man is only a madman. He is harmless.

SAGISAKA. Madmen are not harmless, and I do not believe that he is mad.

CAPTAIN. Drunken, then.

SAGISAKA. He is neither one nor the other. He is pretending.

CAPTAIN. If he is pretending, I will see to him.

SAGISAKA. You promise?

CAPTAIN. Yes, but that is not pretence. Watch him there as he comes.

SAGISAKA. I shall watch him very narrowly.

CAPTAIN. What is he saying?

SAGISAKA. Some folly. If I lift my hand like this, it will be a sign; and then you will kill him.

CAPTAIN. If he is pretending, yes; right; but this poor fellow is not pretending.

Enter KURANO *with* GIRL

KURANO. This is she. This is she who makes us mad. Look at her, she has driven me mad; it is in her eyes. It is bad when we are young, for then they smile, and we tear at the world's throat, and throw ourselves away, and all they want is vanity. If mirrors could speak, men would never be troubled by them. Look at her. All this beautiful bait to catch the little foolish fish in man.

It is beautiful, those eyes and the mouth, and all the curves, and the ears and the pretty teeth. Men have thought of these things going to death; thought of them with prayers. [*To* CAPTAIN.] Look at her. Is not she a beautiful thing? You've prayed to this in your time.

CAPTAIN. Ay, in my time.

KURANO. And you?

SAGISAKA. Kurano, leave off pretending that you are mad and listen to what I have to say to you.

KURANO. Do you believe in the gods?

SAGISAKA. I am not deceived, Kurano.

KURANO. If you believe in the gods you should be thankful.

SAGISAKA. Give heed, Captain. Why?

KURANO. Because your mother played false with a millstone.

CAPTAIN. What makes you think that?

KURANO. It may have been flints; but it was something hard; and so you were spared feelings.

You were never driven mad by one of these things. You never will be; this does not stir you. Be glad; they are fatal things. When we grow up they twine round us and fawn and purr and clog us to a standstill. They call themselves our mates. O heaven! that a thing so empty should have such power upon men. Do you see this head, how beautiful it is? Is not it wonderful, poised on the throat like that? Look how the flesh dimples, and then these shadows, and the red lips that the worm will eat, and these eyes that glitter so and tell her brain about us. Did you ever cut open such a head?

SAGISAKA. No; did you?

KURANO. With my mind. There was nothing there. I was puzzled at that.

SAGISAKA. Captain.

CAPTAIN. Do you know where you are, Kurano?

KURANO. Yes. At a very interesting point. I was saying that I was puzzled. Then I saw

that these things are parasites, who suck their lives from ours. Our life gives them life. Our imaginations give them a mind, they have none of themselves. There is nothing in them. They are only shells and coffins where we bury our best thoughts. They turn them to dust and give back nothing. Why should we deceive ourselves about them? Can you tell me why?

CAPTAIN. It would take a wiser man than me to answer that.

KURANO. Yet you and that fellow there rule the world.

SAGISAKA. We will not wait for any more, Captain; this is not madness.

CAPTAIN. It is an odd kind of talk.

SAGISAKA. Kill him when he comes back to us. I will keep his attention.

CAPTAIN. It is not like mad to me, it is more like one of these frenzies.

SAGISAKA. Well, end it. Kill him.

CAPTAIN. I have half a mind. Kurano; do you see the house on fire?

KURANO. Do not. Do not. You are always interrupting. I am going to sing to you.

Once, very long ago,
When there was still the sun,
Before these times, before
The light was darkened,
One whom we used to know
Made life most noble; one
Who would have changed the world
Had people hearkened.

It was a dream. Perhaps
Time drugs the soul with dreams
To all but blind desire
For high attempt;
Then the intense string snaps;
The project seems
A hearth without a fire;
A madness dreamt.

SAGISAKA. I think that decides it. Now, Captain.

KURANO [*to* SAGISAKA]. What can it decide? Do you think I blame you? You are stupid, you are vulgar, you play into life's hands. It is life that I blame, life is the enemy—life, who takes my friend and leaves you, the usurer, and you, the bully, and you, the doll. Come on, then, for I will fight with life till I drag him from behind his veil. He is behind you and behind you and behind you and I will have him from his hiding-place. No, you shall not escape. I will have you. Out of my way. And you, the doll, the clog, to be left when my friend is taken. . . [*He beats them with a cloak.*] No. No. Forgive me. I am not settled in my wits. You had better give me wine. For I'm going to law, and must have my wits about me. Wine will steady me. I fill to you and to you and to you, and then I fill to myself. Then we will drink and fall asleep.

CAPTAIN. There can be no mistaking that.

SAGISAKA. I was wrong. He is mad.

CAPTAIN. A raving madman.

KURANO [*to* GIRL]. We'll drink and sing:

Wine is a strong drink
Beauty is a stronger
Grief makes a man think
And makes the day longer.

So give a man beauty, and give a man wine,
And drink to your true love while I drink to mine.

[*Falls asleep on the ground, spilling the bowl.*

SAGISAKA [*kicking him*]. So much for Lord Kurano.

CAPTAIN. It is a pity. There was something in some of what he said. He has been a fine man; a soldier they said?

SAGISAKA. Yes.

CAPTAIN. We come to strange ruins. Perhaps he would be happier if I were to end him. Let sleepers be; sleep is better than nothing.

Enter KIRA *with* HARIMA

KIRA. What news of Kurano?

SAGISAKA. There.

HARIMA. Drunk?

SAGISAKA. Drunk and raving. His brain is turned.

KIRA. Turned? Are you sure he is not pretending?

CAPTAIN. He is not pretending, Lord Kira.

SAGISAKA. I suspected him, but this last has convinced me.

KIRA. It falls out luckily.

SAGISAKA. I was not sure . . . whether to kill him in any case.

KIRA. No, no, no; nothing of the sort.

SAGISAKA. He said something of going to law.

KIRA. Well, we must humour him. All else goes well?

SAGISAKA. All the men of the estate have scattered; this blow has destroyed them.

KIRA. A higher power has been in this. It is a mercy from above.

HARIMA. True.

KIRA. Come, we will celebrate this happy day fittingly; meanwhile let us give thanks at the temple.

[*Exeunt* KIRA, SAGISAKA, CAPTAIN.

HARIMA [*lingering*]. Sot and coward! Beast. You called yourself Asano's friend. Pah, you drunkard. May your own friends let you die so.

[*Kicks him and exit. A moment passes; a distant bell strikes.*

KURANO [*rises*]. So there is mercy for the madman, none for the wise man, it seems. Now, you blind wolves, you shall see whether I have forgotten. Thus! thus!

[*He tears his robes across.*

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I—*The outer scene.* THE HERALD. KURANO *in the background.*

THE HERALD.

Comrades, imagine that a year has passed.
Asano's men have not avenged their lord.
They have been wanderers, houseless to the blast,
Keeping most bravely to their plighted word,
Biding revenge, until the Courts declare
Whether Asano's brother may be heir.

To-day the Judge has uttered his decree
That Lord Asano's castle fief and lands
Are forfeit to the Envoy and shall be
Given forever into Kira's hands;
For Kira's plans have thrived. The Court intends
To crown him Duke before to-morrow ends.

This news so fills the Ronin with despair
That seventy men desert Kurano's band,
Making all hope of vengeance empty air;
Since the remainder cannot hope to stand
Against the thousand guards in Kira's pay,
Kurano's planned revenge is swept away.

Here in the snow, alone with cruel thought,
He thinks of his dear comrade tricked to death,
Kira in pride and vengeance brought to naught,
And justice by decree made empty breath.
Friendship and justice, hate and vengeance fail;
Nothing remains, but love that cannot quail.

His son is coming, bringing bitter news;
Life has no pity on the men who lose.

[*Exit* HERALD.

Enter CHIKARA

KURANO. Chikara, is that you? Come, boy, I have news to tell you. We have lost the suit of the inheritance.

CHIKARA. I expected that, father. Kira is the law here now.

KURANO. Yes, he is. . . . But you are shaking; what makes you so white, boy?

CHIKARA. Nothing, father. Have you had good sales to-day, father?

KURANO. No, boy; none yet.

CHIKARA. Are you selling toys to-day, father?

KURANO. Not toys, dear lad; toys are luxuries. I sell vanities; they are necessaries. But you tremble like a leaf. . . . What is it?

CHIKARA. It must be the cold, father.

KURANO. You must have my old cloak, Chikara.

CHIKARA. Then you'll be cold.

KURANO. No, I am too hot. I have been excited. Let me put it well round you.

CHIKARA. Thank you, father. What has made you excited?

KURANO. Thoughts.

CHIKARA. Were you thinking what night it is, father?

KURANO. No, boy. What night is it?

CHIKARA. It is a year to-night since we left home. The men are meeting to-night. They mean to keep the year. Will you go, father?

KURANO. No, boy, I do not think to go.

CHIKARA. How strangely you answer, father.

KURANO. Do I? Well . . . my thoughts are strange.

CHIKARA. Father, may I say something?

KURANO. Yes, boy.

CHIKARA. Will you give up the drinking and singing?

KURANO. Why, boy?

CHIKARA. Father, it cuts me to the quick to hear the men about you; they say you have forgotten our master.

KURANO. I have not done that, Chikara.

CHIKARA. I am sorry, father. Father.

KURANO. Yes?

CHIKARA. If Kira were to die, from some illness, should we all go back home and be knights, as we were before?

KURANO. If he were to die, boy; have you heard that he is ill?

CHIKARA. One hears all sorts of things, father, and fears all sorts of things.

KURANO. Kira is cunning; he would like us to fear all sorts of things. But what is the matter, dear lad? Your brow is burning. You are ill?

CHIKARA. I am not, father. I was only thinking, that if he were to fall ill and die, it would be a bad thing.

KURANO. Yes; that would be a bad thing.

CHIKARA. I think it would be terrible, father. [*He breaks down.*

KURANO. Ah, boy, this is the world we used to read of together.

CHIKARA. Have you heard about mother, father?

KURANO. No, boy; never since.

CHIKARA. Father, I would give anything that you had not sent her away.

KURANO. My lad, we are not like other people, who can enjoy themselves. We were born knights, with duties.

CHIKARA. You know she has killed herself. She said there was a woman's way of being faithful. She would not keep you back?

KURANO. No, boy. She would not keep me back. She would not keep you back. So, she is dead. Chikara, my boy.

CHIKARA. Yes, father?

KURANO. Once a woman of our ancestors was defending a doorway with her husband against the enemy. She was shot in the breast with an arrow. She cried to her husband, "Never mind me. But use my body as a shield and keep the door." So he did.

CHIKARA. Was she killed, father?

KURANO. As far as such souls die she died.

CHIKARA. You never told me that tale before, father.

KURANO. No, we told old gentle tales, in the evening bell-time. Did I ever tell you of Choryo?

CHIKARA. No, father. Who was he?

KURANO. A knight like us, lad. A lord killed Choryo's friend; it was Choryo's duty to avenge him. But the lord was camped with his army, with soldiers all about him. Choryo was alone, but for his son.

CHIKARA. Did they do anything, father?

KURANO. They crept into the lord's camp at night, right up to his tent, through all the guards.

CHIKARA. Did they kill him?

KURANO. No, boy, they were caught, and put to death, like thieves.

CHIKARA. O father!

KURANO. That is why they are remembered, perhaps. They are in the stories.

CHIKARA. I believe you are making up these tales, father.

KURANO. I've been thinking in these last hours, boy. The world talks much about brotherhood; it is nothing to fatherhood. It is a proud thing to be a knight, and to have my son beside me.

Are not you very proud to wear a sword, Chikara?

CHIKARA. Yes, father.

KURANO. All the evil in the world is at the mercy of a sword.

CHIKARA. Why do they let Kira wear a sword, father?

KURANO. Evil can be very strong when knights forget their oaths.

Kira is to be made Duke to-morrow, and to have our lord's estates.

CHIKARA. Are we going to kill him then, father?

KURANO. No, boy; I am afraid not.

CHIKARA. Father, dear.

KURANO. Yes, my dear lad.

CHIKARA. The men say a terrible thing about you.

KURANO. What?

CHIKARA. That you care for the drink more than for fighting Kira.

KURANO. Yes; they may say that. Do you think that?

CHIKARA. No, father.

KURANO. Ah, lad, I've been trying to blind Kira. The drink was nothing but a blind.

CHIKARA. You have blinded the men, father.

KURANO. Does it make any difference?

CHIKARA. It makes all the difference.

KURANO. You are wrong, boy.

CHIKARA. If I am wrong, will you meet them to-night and tell them?

KURANO. How your voice rings, lad, and only last year you were playing at school. Do you remember?

CHIKARA. Yes, with old Daigaku.

KURANO. Now you are alone with me.

Listen, Chikara, there has been a break in the League; over seventy have left us. It is all over with the League.

CHIKARA. Yes, father.

KURANO. I cannot trust the others now. Our duty rests on us two. Do you understand?

CHIKARA. It is on us two, father.

KURANO. We must take desperate risks, like Choryo. Will you come, now?

CHIKARA. Where to, father?

KURANO. To Kira's palace.

CHIKARA. Yes, father.

KURANO. There will be many workmen about, getting ready for to-morrow, perhaps we shall be able to get in. Do you know Kira?

CHIKARA. No, father.

KURANO. He is a tall man, very noble-

looking, with grey hair. He is restless and has quick eyes and a great voice. He is very glorious in his dress. But you will know him by one thing; he commands.

CHIKARA. Yes, father.

KURANO. If we get in, perhaps we shall only see, only spy out the land, see the guards.

CHIKARA. Yes, father.

KURANO. But Kira walks sometimes in the courtyard.

CHIKARA. Yes, father.

KURANO. There is a kind of god, boy.

CHIKARA. Yes, father.

KURANO. If we see Kira, if we get near him, keep my left side and back.

CHIKARA. I will, father, while I live.

KURANO. You are like your mother, boy. She was a very noble woman, Chikara. She told me strange things, once, long ago. Come, now.

Sing as we go, lad.

CHIKARA.

Sometimes, when guests have gone, the host remembers
Sweet courteous things unsaid.
We two have talked our hearts out to the embers,
And now go hand in hand, down to the dead.

CURTAIN

SCENE II—*The* RONIN *grouped in the dark in the snow, moaning to themselves.*

FIRST RONIN. Has Lord Kurano come?

SECOND RONIN. No.

FIRST RONIN. Are all the others here?

SECOND RONIN. All who are coming.

FIRST RONIN. Friends.

SECOND AND THIRD RONIN. Let our friend speak.

FIRST RONIN. Asano's men.

FOURTH AND FIFTH RONIN. Quiet! Quiet!

FIRST RONIN. This is the last meeting of our League. Our brotherhood of misery comes to an end.

[*A moan passes over the crowd.*

We have starved and wandered as Kurano bade. Each in his way we have all prepared for an attack on Kira, but to-day, as you know, three-fifths of our men have left us; all hope of

revenge is gone. Our share in the preparations was to supply swords. Here they are, all that we have. We starved and begged and dug in the fields to buy them. We shall not want them now. So . . . let them lie.

[*Flings them down.*

SECOND RONIN. I and my fellows had an easier task. We had only to spy on Kira. We know Kira's palace as we knew ours. These plans are our share. But we shall not want them now. Lie there with the swords.

[*Flings them down.*

THIRD RONIN. It was our task to supply armour. This is what we made. We made it, after work, in the fields, in the cold nights, out of whatever we could get, broken metal and leather; rusty with the snow, too. Since it will not be used, no matter. Ground arms, with the rest.

FOURTH RONIN. Our band swore to get hooks and ladders in case we should scale

Kira's palace. Here they are; the best we could get. Heap them down. We shall never climb by them.

FIFTH RONIN. I and my fellows made these lanterns in case we should make a night attack. They will not light us to any revenge. They may lie dark. [*Flings them down.*

FIRST RONIN. We have been a year in the rice plots, as farmers' men.

SECOND RONIN. We have been joiners and beggars and fruit-sellers.

THIRD RONIN. We have been wanderers, glad of broken meats at the door.

FOURTH RONIN. We have been fishermen at sea.

FIFTH RONIN. We have been dogs in the kennels, outcasts.

FIRST RONIN. And whatever we have been, these things were made at the risk of our lives, when it was death by decree to plot revenge or speak revenge.

SECOND RONIN. We might have spared ourselves the pain.

FIRST RONIN. Not ourselves. Our wives and children might have been spared. My wife came to me, she had stabbed herself in the breast. She said: "You are a knight. You must avenge your lord, not think of women."

Her beauty died there.
My guest went from my fireside.
Our talk, our friendship,
Broken, unfinished,
The best things unsaid.

SECOND RONIN. I had no wife. I was to have been married before the ruin. But I had to think of my lord, not of marriage. I never saw her again. The girl has gone now, ruined, too; and whether she is dead or in a teahouse I shall never know.

THIRD RONIN. I had no wife, nor lover, I am a widower. I had a little son. They told

me he was lying on the flowers. I brought him in to the shed where we lived, we had no proper home. He had killed himself that I might be free to kill Kira. His little hands were clenched on the dirk.

FOURTH RONIN. My father and mother had a right to peace, after eighty years. But they were afraid that they might be a burden on me, while I had my duty to my lord to do. They killed themselves.

And all these lives go for nothing.

FIFTH RONIN. Those losses were beautiful, you can be proud of them. Kira brought other losses on me. I saw my children starved to death.

We lay on the reeds
In the marshy places.
They cried for food,
For the sweet cakes of old.
"Father, father,
I am so hungry!

May I have a rice-cake?
I have had no rice-cake
All to-day."

All around
Were the marshy places.
They cried for food,
Those sons of mine.
"Father," they said,
"Will it soon be food-time?
Can you feed us, father?"
I told them, "No."
And then they cried.

Kira it was,
The great Lord Kira,
Who burnt our home
And drove us forth.
It was his deed
That starved my children,
My little sons
In the wild swans' lair.

We cannot kill him,
We cannot harm him,
We cannot rob him
Of a moment's pleasure,
The unatoned blood
Cries unheeded.
We are poor men
Lost in the snow.

First Ronin. That is a true song, brother; we are lost indeed.

Second Ronin. Kira triumphs.

Fifth Ronin. He drinks with his dancing women, he is made Duke.

Third Ronin. He will be harsher to us now.

Fourth Ronin. I thought the gods checked pride, but evil like Kira's checks the gods.

First Ronin. Since all is useless, we will burn these things and dissolve the League.

Second Ronin. There is nothing else that we can do.

THIRD RONIN. Heap them together.

FOURTH RONIN. Pour the oil upon them.

FIFTH RONIN. These were the deserters' banners; they had better burn.

FIRST RONIN. So, pile them, and good-bye to revenge. Would the deserters were burning with them!

VOICES.

Burn, with our hopes, to ashes, all is past,
The waiting in the snow,
The year-long pain,
The faith that equal justice falls at last.
We may depart, but not with hope again.
So burn, so perish, as the fire drives,
Our hope, our love, our service, all our lives.

Enter KURANO *and* CHIKARA

VOICES. You come too late, Lord Kurano; you should have come before, we are disbanded.

KURANO. Not yet, not for a moment. There

are things I wish to say to you. Tread out the fire. Come nearer.

First Ronin. What have you to say to us, Lord Kurano?

Second Ronin. You can say nothing, but that we are ruined while Kira is triumphant.

Kurano. I have just come from Kira's palace.

Third Ronin. What did you see there?

Kurano. Preparations for to-morrow; a muster of the guards.

First Ronin. What then?

Kurano. Kira came out.

Voices. Ah, the accursed!

Kurano. He had gifts for the guards for guarding him. This was in the courtyard. I was watching through the gates. The gates have been gilded for to-morrow, they are like gold. There were a thousand guards, in armour.

Voices. We know their strength, too well.

Kurano. I had not seen them march be-

fore. They marched past Kira to salute, till the courtyard shook. They sang, too, rank after rank, a song in praise of Kira. "Aha, Aha, Kira." They came straight towards me; the dust in the court was like smoke.

They came straight to the gates. The gates were opened and they came through, horsemen and swordsmen, with fifes and banners. They still sang to Kira: "Bow down to Kira, to Kira the Duke." There were ten picked companies marching there. They thought I was a beggar at the gate, they flung money to me. They all came glittering out, singing their song about Kira in his glory.

When they had all come out, the gates were closed, and presently a little old man came out and locked them and a boy brought rice and flung it to the pigeons, and then it was sunset, and the gilders packed their tools and went home, and twilight came and a star, and they brought lanterns then and hung them in the

courtyard so that one saw shadows, and they lit the cresset on the gate so that it was all wavering light.

Presently it began to snow, and the snow came down and down, but I stayed on by the gate in a kind of dream, for things came into my head about my friend, my friend Asano. He came into me here next my heart, talking to me. "Kurano, Kurano, and all my men of old time, fellowship goes on after death, dear brothers, in its struggle against wrong."

And I fell into a kind of dream about the Envoy, who is to make Kira Duke, being the man who condemned Asano a year ago; and I thought, "Yes, the Envoy is coming, and the palace is a sacred place and so Kira has dismissed his guards."

YELLS. What? What?

KURANO. He has dismissed them till to-morrow, and on this snowy night, he'll be unprepared, and

We can attack him if you will.

VOICES. Free? Free to attack him? The guards are gone. We can attack him.

KURANO. Yes, if you will. Will you?

VOICES. Very well; we will; to-night.

KURANO. Let us arm, then. Chikara, boy, we are going to die in a few hours. They are excited now, and will be, for a time, but it may pass. I look to you to help me to keep them thus.

CHIKARA. Very well, father.

THE RONIN. We are ready, Master Kurano.

KURANO. Now we will cast off our rags for death, and say our death-poems. This is the knife that killed our Master Asano. Let us consecrate ourselves to the washing of the blood away.

CHIKARA. I am the youngest, I will say my death-poem first: "Life is a banquet spread, but I cannot stay for the feast."

First Ronin. I will say mine: "To-morrow I shall be under the grass, but to-night I am a man and on to-morrow's morrow men shall talk of me."

Second Ronin. I will say mine: "Young men often die for old men, it is the way of the world. I am an old man dying with young men in the young man's cause, and I am happy."

Third Ronin. I will say mine:

"We are outlaws, going to die like outlaws.

"The flowers from our bones will be better laws."

Fourth Ronin. I will say mine: "Brave men going to battle for our land will stop to lay flowers upon our graves."

Kurano. I will say mine: "Evil is very strong, but men who will give their lives are stronger."

Let us go out into the night.

FIRST RONIN. We should have a banner, master.

KURANO [*raising the dagger*]. This is our banner. Play music. March!

[*They go out to a droning oboe and the slow tapping of a drum. They begin a pæan.*

CURTAIN

SCENE III—*The inner scene.* KIRA'S *palace.* SAGISAKA. KIRA.

SAGISAKA. Will you not rest, my lord? To-morrow's ritual will be long; you will be fatigued.

KIRA. Honours do not fatigue. About those tenants near the stream. See them all turned out to-morrow, and their houses pulled down. I mean to dam the river there and make a fish-pond.

SAGISAKA. If you made the fish-pond above, my lord, or shut them from the sea below . . . they would be forced out, without your sending a man.

KIRA. That may have served in the old days. I am strong enough now for directer methods. Have you had any news of Kurano since his suits were heard?

SAGISAKA. He has flung away his swords.

He goes in rags like a beggar, they say; drunk in the kennel half his time; mad the rest.

KIRA. Ah! My plan throve, you see. Asano's men have quarrelled. Their quarrelling so soon perhaps seems suspicious?

SAGISAKA. I doubt their love for Asano; men hate philanthropists.

KIRA. It might have been better to have watched them more closely.

SAGISAKA. People so broken as Asano's will not be able to do much.

KIRA. I wonder if we were wise to dismiss the guards.

SAGISAKA. We should hear in time if there were any movement. We could recall the guards. They are only half a march away.

KIRA. True. Still. . . . It might be better.

SAGISAKA. I will write the order for them to return.

KIRA. Give me some wine, Sagisaka.

[*Drinks.*] I will have up that woman from the village, the pretty one.

SAGISAKA [*writing*]. The one you saw this morning?

KIRA. The one with the broad brow.

SAGISAKA. You have an eye for them, my lord.

KIRA. She is here, I suppose?

SAGISAKA. I will send her.

KIRA. What is this?

SAGISAKA. The order for the guards; if you will sign it I will send a rider with it.

KIRA. Now? It must be midnight. Whom would you send?

SAGISAKA. A groom will take it.

KIRA. It is a bitter night; still snowing. Do you know if the horses have been roughed?

SAGISAKA. They were going to rough them to-morrow if the frost held.

KIRA. Send me the stableman to-morrow; the fool should have roughed them to-day.

SAGISAKA. We could rough one now if you would like the letter sent.

KIRA. It is spoiling six men's sleep for the sake of one man's folly. I will cast that man, and promote the other, the horse-breaker.

SAGISAKA. Very well, my lord.

KIRA. What are the women like, down at the fishery?

SAGISAKA. There's a girl I would like you to see.

KIRA. A girl, eh?

SAGISAKA. She's a bright little thing.

KIRA. I would like to see her to-night.

SAGISAKA. She cannot be here till to-morrow.

KIRA. I will have the other then, for now.

SAGISAKA. Here are the sweetmeats.

KIRA. Thank you, Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. I will tell the women to send her up.

KIRA. Yes. Good-night, Sagisaka. Oh, Sagisaka.

SAGISAKA. My lord?

KIRA. Take notes of this, please.

SAGISAKA. Certainly, Lord Kira.

KIRA. To-morrow, before everything, send out two whom you can trust to find out about Asano's men, what they are doing and what parties they are in.

SAGISAKA. I will see to it myself. Is there anything else?

KIRA. We do not renew Nekko's bond.

SAGISAKA. He is counting on us.

KIRA. I cannot renew; the man's a fool. There was another thing . . . it has slipped my mind. . . . Oh, about Kurano.

SAGISAKA. Yes, Lord Kira?

KIRA. We will have him here, where he can live with some dignity; after all the man is a gentleman, nobly born. I do not like to think of him as he is.

SAGISAKA. It shall be done, my lord.

KIRA. You disapprove?

SAGISAKA. No, my lord. What was that?

KIRA. What?

SAGISAKA. I thought I heard a tapping.

KIRA. It was the snow. That window often rattles in bad weather.

SAGISAKA. It sounded more like a branch.

KIRA. The yellow plum-tree, no doubt; it needs cutting back. [*Drinks.*] Do not send the girl yet. I want to finish that problem of chess.

[*He takes chessmen.*

SAGISAKA. Very well, my lord. I will go, then.

KIRA. Good-night, Sagisaka. Open the window, as you go, the room's too hot. Is it still snowing?

SAGISAKA. A little. The moon's up. I'll leave the window. [*Passing* KIRA.] I believe you should move the knight, my lord.

KIRA. Nonsense, Sagisaka; look where the castle is.

SAGISAKA. Well, good-night, my lord.

KIRA. Good-night. [SAGISAKA *goes and re-enters.*] Well?

SAGISAKA. Shall I send that order to the guards?

KIRA. To-morrow will do.

SAGISAKA. It shall go at sunrise.

KIRA. Are you anxious? Do you feel that the guards ought to be here?

SAGISAKA. One feels safer with them.

KIRA. Ah, we are safe.

SAGISAKA. I hope so, my lord.

KIRA. I know so. What is to hurt us?

SAGISAKA. I don't know, my lord.

KIRA. Nor I.

SAGISAKA. I am sorry to have disturbed you, my lord.

KIRA. Wait. Is my servant outside?

SAGISAKA. He is just outside the door.

KIRA. He will call when I am ready. Go to rest now; we shall have a hard day to-morrow. [*Exit* SAGISAKA.] [*To himself.*] If I move the knight, the castle takes it. What other move can the knight have? Not there. There? No. The king must move. [*A packet is thrown in.*] [*Quoting.*]

"Earth to the king is but a chessboard laid,
With men and women waiting to be played."

[*A tapping.*] What is that? [*Goes to window.*] It rattles, yet the wind has fallen. [*Returning.*] What is this? [*Picks up packet.*] Did Sagisaka drop this? Was it thrown in? I cannot read it in this light. [*Comes forward to read.*] [*Reading.*] "Danger. Danger. Danger!" What danger? It is another of these madmen. Pah! [*Settling to his game.*] Now if I moved the pawn . . . the pawn is the key. . . .

A VOICE. Read it, Kira.

KIRA. What?

VOICE. Read it, Kira.

KIRA. Who said, "Read it, Kira?" [*Crossing to window.*] Can anyone be in the courtyard? It is all bright moonlight. I heard a voice.

I am sure I heard a voice. [*Goes to door.*] Ono.

SERVANT. Yes, my lord?

KIRA. Did you hear a voice just then?

SERVANT. No, my lord.

KIRA. There was a voice calling my name.

SERVANT. I heard nothing, my lord. It has been all quiet in the house.

KIRA. No one has been to the door?

SERVANT. No one, my lord.

KIRA. Do you see any tracks in the snow there?

SERVANT. It is all white, untrodden snow, my lord.

KIRA. Send two of the men round with lanterns to make sure.

SERVANT. Very good, my lord. Shall I bar the window, my lord?

KIRA. Yes, close the window; then go. [*Exit* SERVANT.] Strange. There was a voice. I am well; am I well? What am I to read? [*Opens and reads.*] "You are to be killed to-night. Hide. Hide." I am weary of these warnings. I will have them ended. It is strange that they still come. To-morrow I will root out those Asano people. [*Writes.*] There. There. Then these warnings will end. [*The little god on the bracket at the back of the stage falls and breaks.*] What was that?

ONO *enters.*

ONO. Are you hurt, my lord?

KIRA. No. This fell.

ONO. May the gods turn it to our good. What made it fall?

KIRA. The support was rotten, look. It is broken to pieces.

ONO. May the gods have pity on us!

KIRA. Why do you say that? You are trembling.

ONO. This is the god of this house and it is broken.

KIRA. It is a piece of baked clay which fell on to a piece of stone.

ONO. It is your god and it is broken.

KIRA. And what do you think that means?

ONO. May the gods prevent it being so!

KIRA. What does it mean?

ONO. That your luck is passing.

KIRA. So it is, Ono. Lord Kira is passing. To-morrow he becomes Duke and Overlord. To-morrow, did I say? No, to-day. What time is it?

ONO. On the stroke of twelve, my lord.

KIRA. Did the watchmen find anything?

ONO. Nothing, my lord, all was quiet, but for one thing.

KIRA. What was that?

ONO. The dogs were howling.

KIRA. They were baying the moon.

ONO. No, my lord.

KIRA. Then it is the frost; their drink is frozen.

ONO. They were baying at something in the air.

KIRA. What?

ONO. Something over the house; a bird that was flying away.

KIRA. It was an owl like yourself, Ono. Take these orders. They are to be in the Captain's hands by noon to-morrow. Is that woman ready?

ONO. Yes, my lord.

KIRA. Go down with those orders and then send her up. [*Exit* ONO.] [*Picking up the shards.*] You have watched out your time. You have been with me since the beginning. Now we shall have a new one. A famous artist will make one all of gold, for Duke

Kira. It will watch me go on, from power to power, Duke Kira, Prince Kira.

Prince Kira. [*Drinks.*] Why not?

The door opens and a woman appears.

You are the Starblossom?

Woman. Yes, lord.

Kira. Will you not put off that veil?

Woman. No, lord.

Kira. Let me help you.

Woman. No.

Kira. Do not shrink from me. I hear you have a very beautiful voice, a thrilling voice. These sweetmeats are for the voice. Will you not sing to me?

Woman. I cannot sing.

Kira. Here is the viol. I am sure that you will play to me.

Woman. I am terrified, terrified.

Kira. Take this viol, now, and let me hear your voice. You will spoil your singing if you

are terrified. Look at these pearls, every word that you utter is a pearl; these shall be yours for one song. Your voice is cool and white; it is as beautiful as these pearls. There is the hand, now, on the strings; a touch and music comes. Sing me some song that means very much to you, some gentle song like your voice, a delicate song, like a touch upon the heart. You have suffered, to have such a voice; you have had a sorrow.

WOMAN. Yes, Lord Kira.

KIRA. Sing to me of that, if it is not too great a pain.

WOMAN. Are you Lord Kira?

KIRA. Yes.

WOMAN. They told me you were a devil.

KIRA. You see that they were wrong. Please tell me of yourself. Sing me this song of yourself.

WOMAN. It is not so very beautiful; but it is common enough.

KIRA. It will be human, then, if it is common.

WOMAN. It is human, if sorrow is human.

Queens long ago
Knew sorrowful days,
Seeing their husbands killed,
Their sons destroyed.
Death makes the full heart void,
The cold heart filled,
Those women knew Death's ways,
I also know.

Father and mother gone,
He whom I loved, and now
My sons, my lovely sons,
My three bright boys
Killed, while the sunlight shone,
And blossom filled the bough;
I was so happy once
But Death destroys.

Yet, although Death is great,
Earth's many million tears
Move on the heart of things
Quickening a change to be;
And drop by drop the sea
Moans from its springs,
Its cry will reach God's ears;
Man has not long to wait.
Death is but tool to Fate.

The cup is brimmed in time and then it spills over.

KIRA. You are young to have sorrowed so.

WOMAN. There are younger ones who have sorrowed worse. If you knew what goes on in this land of yours, Lord Kira.

KIRA. You were beautiful when you said that.

WOMAN. Was I?

KIRA. Very. Listen, will you tell me more, tell me of what goes on in this land of mine?

WOMAN. You do not want to hear.

KIRA. From you, I do. There is another thing I want to hear from you.

[*The oboe and the drum far off.*

WOMAN. Hark!

KIRA. You will not put me away like that, Starblossom.

WOMAN. There was a noise. There it is again.

KIRA. We will not mind the noise. I want to hear the music of your voice, saying something.

WOMAN. No, no, no!

KIRA. Saying something sweet, Starblossom. What a beautiful name, it is beautiful like your voice. Will you say this thing, Starblossom, the little sweet word, while I hold your hands like this, and look into your beautiful eyes? [*The music loud, and voices.*

WOMAN. What is it that I must say, Lord Kira?

KIRA. That you love me, Starblossom. How you tremble, little flower; how white you are!

THE PAEAN OF THE RONIN.

The time dragged by till our hearts were broken,
The time dragged by till we cursed the sun;
Now the hour has struck and the word is spoken.
The time is fallen and the deed begun.

Asano. Asano. Over the wall with the banner.

KIRA. What do they say?

WOMAN. It sounds like rejoicing.

KIRA. Ah, yes. To-day I receive the Dukedom.

WOMAN. They are coming to cheer you.

A VOICE. Kira's men. Help me, Kira's men. Help me, I'm alone.

A Voice. Guard the great gates. Shoot at the roof.

Woman. You must show yourself to them.

Kira. You have not said that you love me yet.

Woman. Do you want me to?

Kira. Yes, Starblossom.

Woman. You have not shewn that you love me.

Kira. I will shew you, Starblossom.

Woman [*flinging*]. Fetch me my comb.

Kira. These pearls will serve instead. [*Clasps pearls about her throat.*] Now you are prisoner, beautiful Starblossom.

A Voice. I cannot. Look! They are all sticking in me.

A Voice. O, I am killed . . . killed!

A Voice. Die, you! Where is he?

[*The Paean in snatches.*

Woman. Get away. Listen! Oh, what was that?

KIRA. What! What is this, then?

[*Strikes gong.*

WOMAN. They are fighting.

KIRA [*going to door*]. Where is Ono? Ono!

A VOICE. We are coming, Master Asano.

WOMAN. It is Kurano and his men, O God!

KIRA. Quiet, woman! I must think.

Enter SAGISAKA

SAGISAKA. Run, my lord. Get out of the house. It is Kurano. Run. Go, man. They've surprised us. Hide. Run. Go, you girl. Run.

KIRA. Yes.

[*Drops his white cloak and runs to door right.* SAGISAKA *hides behind the door. The girl flies door left.*

SAGISAKA. Can I get that knife before they come?

[*Crawls out, listens, and crawls back.*

KURANO. He cannot have escaped.

HAZAMA. I have looked. He was not there.

FIRST RONIN. None of us is much hurt. They made a good stand in the courtyard.

KURANO. You're cut about, Hara. Bind his head, Kodera. Come in here. He may be here. Come carefully. [*They enter.*

HAZAMA. He is not here. This is a living-room.

SECOND RONIN. We have come the wrong way. Go back, master.

FIRST RONIN. There is his wine. He is not here. He has got away.

HAZAMA. I believe he has. Let us waste no time here. Come, quickly.

KURANO. Wait. What is this wrapping?

FIRST RONIN. A cloak. Some of their clothes.

KURANO. It is his cloak. Look at the purple edge.

HAZAMA. Master, we have not searched the stables. He may have taken horse by this. Run, you.

KURANO. Wait. This cloak is warm. He must be near. He must have been here within the minute. Come. We'll search this way.

SAGISAKA [*springing out*]. Not yet.

[*He sends* CHIKARA *reeling.*

HAZAMA. Ah, cockerel.

[*Stabs him. The others go past.*

SAGISAKA. I have got . . . one of you. [*Falls.*] Tell the trumpeter . . . tell the trumpeter . . . tell the trumpeter . . . to call . . . the call. [*Dies.*

HAZAMA. They have him. [*Goes to door.*] Come this way, you Ronin. Come this way, Asano's men. Kira is taken.

[*A shout of joy. The* RONIN *flock in and line back of stage.* KURANO *and the others bring in* KIRA.

KURANO. Take that body aside. [SAGISAKA *is drawn aside.*] Be quiet, please. Duke Kira, Overlord of this Province, Knight of the Sacred Presence, Chieftain of the Captains, Supreme

Counsellor. We are the friends and servants of Lord Asano, who was done to death by you, a year ago. We come before you with a message from our beloved master and friend. [*He displays the dagger.*] We cannot rest till our master is avenged. We have the honour, Duke Kira, to request you to kill yourself, with this knife, duly prepared.

[*He kneels and offers the dagger. A long pause.*

The Ronin [*kneeling*]. We have the honour, Duke Kira, to request you to kill yourself.

[*A pause.*

Kurano. Duke Kira, in the name of our beloved master, and friend, we request you to kill yourself. [*A long pause. Drawing his sword.*] Justice must be done, then.

Curtain

SCENE IV—*The outer scene.*

KURANO. Come this way. Come this way. It is but a little way. The word has gone to the Envoy. The order will come in a few minutes.

This is the grave. This is the holy place. We are all anointed and ready. We have kept faith this night, and it will soon be morning. Look, our lanterns are dim, and there is all the dew on the grass. This is Asano's grave. This little green heap where the little flowers grow. So now we have come here. Oh, the joy of being able to come! We are the happy faithful and the birds are beginning.

My beloved man, whom I knew, our master and friend, lying here under the grass, we come here on our knees, to say that we have kept faith. We have broken the chain and spilled the cup. He is dead, Asano.

Asano, beloved master, we offer you back this knife.

It was stained when you left it with us. We have cleansed the stain.

Take it from us, Master Asano, with our love and with our lives.

THE RONIN. Gladly given, Master Asano.

[*A trumpet winds.*

KURANO. Now I receive the herald who will bid us come to you, Asano, in whatever windy place the dead know, to be with you forever. [*A trumpet winds.*

The HERALD *enters.*

THE HERALD. Kurano and the retainers of Asano Takumi no Kami.

KURANO. We are here.

THE HERALD. I have a message for you.

That you are to kill yourselves here, on this spot for the murder of Duke Kira.

[*He presents the order.*

KURANO. We accept the order. You shall witness our obedience to it.

THE HERALD. I salute you, faithful ones.

KURANO. You trumpeters, who call the faithful to death in all the armies of the world, blow a long point

That long-dead heroes
Manning the ramparts of God
May hear us coming,
Baring our hearts to the sword
For him we loved so.

CURTAIN

Printed in the United States of America

THE following pages contain advertisements of books by the same author.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

John M. Synge: A Few Personal Recollections with Biographical Notes

By JOHN MASEFIELD

Author of "The Everlasting Mercy," etc.

With frontispiece. Boards, 12mo. Edition limited to 500 numbered copies, $1.00

An interesting little book is this in which one of the most distinguished poets of the day gives his impressions of Synge. The matter is very intimate in nature, narrating Mr. Masefield's relations with the Irish writer, reproducing conversations with him and throwing in this personal way new light on the character and genius of the man.

Philip the King, and Other Poems

By JOHN MASEFIELD

Author of "The Tragedy of Pompey," "The Everlasting Mercy," "The Daffodil Fields"

Cloth, 12mo, $1.25

"Mr. Masefield's new poetical drama is a piece of work such as only the author of 'Nan' and 'The Tragedy of Pompey' could have written, tense in situation and impressive in its poetry. . . . In addition to this important play, the volume contains some new and powerful narrative poems of the sea — the men who live on it and their ships. There are also some shorter lyrics as well as an impressive poem on the present war in Europe which expresses, perhaps, better than anything yet written, the true spirit of England in the present struggle."

"Mr. Masefield has never done anything better than these poems."
— *Argonaut.*

"The compelling strength of John Masefield's genius is revealed in the memorable poem, 'August, 1914,' published in his latest volume of poetry."
— *Review of Reviews.*

"Reveals a notable sense of literary restraint, and a remarkable gift of imaginative analysis." — *Nation.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers **64-66 Fifth Avenue** **New York**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Tragedy of Pompey the Great

Cloth, 12mo, $1.25

"To one who reads Mr. Masefield's great play with a close understanding of his meaning there cannot be too high a praise with which to applaud the achievement. Though classical in theme and characters, it is free from those blemishes of pedantry which usually attend such efforts by modern dramatists, and the reason is that Mr. Masefield is frankly concerned with a vital purpose in character that is neither ancient nor modern, and strengthens his purpose by using the same direct and vibrant prose that he uses in his English pastoral tragedy of 'Nan.'" — *Boston Transcript.*

"'The Tragedy of Pompey the Great' is different. Masefield approaches it in the same spirit of freedom from convention, with the same boldness of the actual which one finds in his previous work. He is no statuesque Pompey, spouting prose lines masquerading as poetry. Masefield has given us Pompey, the man. He has made human the men who surrounded the old Roman. And his drama is in modern prose, yet strikes no note of discord." — *The Pittsburgh Post.*

"He makes the character of Pompey vivid from the start." — *San Francisco Chronicle.*

"It is an astonishing concise piece of writing, in which dramatic unities are respected, as well as the limitations of the stage, to such an extent that the play would be almost conventional were it not for the fact that it adds another splendid figure to modern English drama. . . . The character that Masefield has drawn with undoubted historical accuracy, as well as fine feeling, is a really superb figure."—*Brooklyn Daily Eagle.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers 64-66 Fifth Avenue New York

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

New Editions of JOHN MASEFIELD'S Other Works

THE DAFFODIL FIELDS

Second Edition. $1.25

"Neither in the design nor in the telling did, or could, 'Enoch Arden' come near the artistic truth of 'The Daffodil Fields.'"—Sir QUILLER-COUCH, *Cambridge University.*

THE STORY OF A ROUND-HOUSE, AND OTHER POEMS

New and Revised Edition. $1.30

"The story of that rounding of the Horn! Never in prose has the sea been so tremendously described."—*Chicago Evening Post.*

THE EVERLASTING MERCY and THE WIDOW IN THE BYE STREET

(Awarded the Royal Society of Literature's prize of $500.)

New and Revised Edition. $1.25

"Mr. Masefield comes like a flash of light across contemporary English poetry. The improbable has been accomplished; he has made poetry out of the very material that has refused to yield it for almost a score of years."—*Boston Evening Transcript.*

PUBLISHED BY

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

64-66 Fifth Avenue New York

IMPORTANT BOOKS OF POETRY

By JOHN MASEFIELD

SALT WATER BALLADS

Cloth, 12mo, $1.00

"Masefield has prisoned in verse the spirit of life at sea." — *New York Sun.*

". . . full of memorable sea pictures." — *San Francisco Chronicle.*

" . . . shows Masefield at his best." — *Philadelphia Record.*

". . . real poetry, musical and spontaneous." — *Literary Digest.*

A MAINSAIL HAUL

Cloth, 12mo, $1.25

"The cruelty, the primitive and passionate brutality, the rough fearlessness, the superstitious horror and fantasy, of human nature, under the spell of the sea and the tyranny of ships, are in these pages as we find them in the pages of a very few of the renowned sea writers." — *Boston Transcript.*

"There is strength about everything Masefield writes that compels the feeling that he has an inward eye on which he draws to shape new films of old pictures. In these pictures is freshness combined with power." — *New York Globe.*

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Publishers **64-66 Fifth Avenue** **New York**

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Form L9–20*m*-7,'61(C1437s4)444

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 557 225 0

PR
6025
M37f
1915